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Good Luck.

May

THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

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TO THE MEMORY OF CHARLES LAMB

DEDICATION

WHEN stark oblivion froze above their names
Whose glory shone round Shakespeare's, bright as now,
One eye beheld their light shine full as fame's,
One hand unveiled it: this did none but thou.
Love, stronger than forgetfulness and sleep,
Rose, and bade memory rise, and England hear:
And all the harvest left so long to reap
Shone ripe and rich in every sheaf and ear.

A child it was who first by grace of thine
Communed with gods who share with thee their shrine:
Elder than thou wast ever now I am,
Now that I lay before thee in thanksgiving
Praise of dead men divine and everliving
Whose praise is thine as thine is theirs, Charles Lamb.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE	1
JOHN WEBSTER	15
THOMAS DEKKER	60
JOHN MARSTON	110
THOMAS MIDDLETON	147
WILLIAM ROWLEY	184
THOMAS HEYWOOD	197
GEORGE CHAPMAN	252
CYRIL TOURNEUR	259

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

THE first great English poet was the father of English tragedy and the creator of English blank verse. Chaucer and Spenser were great writers and great men: they shared between them every gift which goes to the making of a poet except the one which alone can make a poet, in the proper sense of the word, great. Neither pathos nor humour nor fancy nor invention will suffice for that: no poet is great as a poet whom no one could ever pretend to recognise as sublime. Sublimity is the test of imagination as distinguished from invention or from fancy: and the first English poet whose powers can be called sublime was Christopher Marlowe.

The majestic and exquisite excellence of various lines and passages in Marlowe's first play must be admitted to relieve, if it cannot be allowed to redeem, the stormy monotony of Titanic truculence which blusters like a simoom through the noisy course of its ten fierce acts. With many

and heavy faults, there is something of genuine greatness in 'Tamburlaine the Great'; and for two grave reasons it must always be remembered with distinction and mentioned with honour. It is the first poem ever written in English blank verse, as distinguished from mere rhymeless decasyllabics; and it contains one of the noblest passages, perhaps indeed the noblest in the literature of the world, ever written by one of the greatest masters of poetry in loving praise of the glorious delights and sublime submission to the everlasting limits of his art. In its highest and most distinctive qualities, in unfaltering and infallible command of the right note of music and the proper tone of colour for the finest touches of poetic execution, no poet of the most elaborate modern school, working at ease upon every consummate resource of luxurious learning and leisurely refinement, has ever excelled the best and most representative work of a man who had literally no models before him, and probably or evidently was often, if not always, compelled to write against time for his living.

The just and generous judgment passed by Goethe on the 'Faustus' of his English predecessor in tragic treatment of the same subject is somewhat more than sufficient to counterbalance the slighting or the sneering references to

that magnificent poem which might have been expected from the ignorance of Byron or the incompetence of Hallam. And the particular note of merit observed, the special point of the praise conferred, by the great German poet should be no less sufficient to dispose of the vulgar misconception yet lingering among sciolists and pretenders to criticism, which regards a writer than whom no man was ever born with a finer or a stronger instinct for perfection of excellence in execution as a mere noble savage of letters, a rough self-taught sketcher or scribbler of crude and rude genius, whose unhewn blocks of verse had in them some veins of rare enough metal to be quarried and polished by Shakespeare. What most impressed the author of 'Faust' in the work of Marlowe was a quality the want of which in the author of 'Manfred' is proof enough to consign his best work to the second or third class at most. 'How greatly it is all planned!' the first requisite of all great work, and one of which the highest genius possible to a greatly gifted barbarian could by no possibility understand the nature or conceive the existence. That Goethe 'had thought of translating it' is perhaps hardly less precious a tribute to its greatness than the fact that it has been actually and admirably translated by the matchless translator of Shakespeare—the son of

Victor Hugo; whose labour of love may thus be said to have made another point in common, and forged as it were another link of union, between Shakespeare and the young master of Shakepeare's youth. Of all great poems in dramatic form it is perhaps the most remarkable for absolute singleness of aim and simplicity of construction; yet is it wholly free from all possible imputation of monotony or aridity. 'Tamburlaine' is monotonous in the general roll and flow of its stately and sonorous verse through a noisy wilderness of perpetual bluster and slaughter; but the unity of tone and purpose in 'Doctor Faustus' is not unrelieved by change of manner and variety of incident. The comic scenes, written evidently with as little of labour as of relish, are for the most part scarcely more than transcripts, thrown into the form of dialogue, from a popular prose 'History of Doctor Faustus'; and therefore should be set down as little to the discredit as to the credit of the poet. Few masterpieces of any age in any language can stand beside this tragic poem—it has hardly the structure of a play—for the qualities of terror and splendour, for intensity of purpose and sublimity of note. In the vision of Helen, for example, the intense perception of loveliness gives actual sublimity to the sweetness and radiance of mere beauty in the passionate

and spontaneous selection of words the most choice and perfect; and in like manner the sublimity of simplicity in Marlowe's conception and expression of the agonies endured by Faustus under the immediate imminence of his doom gives the highest note of beauty, the quality of absolute fitness and propriety, to the sheer straightforwardness of speech in which his agonising horror finds vent ever more and more terrible from the first to the last equally beautiful and fearful verse of that tremendous monologue which has no parallel in all the range of tragedy.

It is now a commonplace of criticism to observe and regret the decline of power and interest after the opening acts of 'The Jew of Malta.' This decline is undeniable, though even the latter part of the play is not wanting in rough energy and a coarse kind of interest; but the first two acts would be sufficient foundation for the durable fame of a dramatic poet. In the blank verse of Milton alone, who perhaps was hardly less indebted than Shakespeare was before him to Marlowe as the first English master of word-music in its grander forms, has the glory or the melody of passages in the opening soliloquy of Barabas been possibly surpassed. The figure of the hero before it degenerates into caricature is as finely touched as the poetic execution is excellent; and the rude

and rapid sketches of the minor characters show at least some vigour and vivacity of touch.

In 'Edward the Second' the interest rises and the execution improves as visibly and as greatly with the course of the advancing story as they decline in 'The Jew of Malta.' The scene of the king's deposition at Kenilworth is almost as much finer in tragic effect and poetic quality as it is shorter and less elaborate than the corresponding scene in Shakespeare's 'King Richard II.' The terror of the death-scene undoubtedly rises into horror; but this horror is with skilful simplicity of treatment preserved from passing into disgust. In pure poetry, in sublime and splendid imagination, this tragedy is excelled by 'Doctor Faustus'; in dramatic power and positive impression of natural effect it is as certainly the masterpiece of Marlowe. It was almost inevitable, in the hands of any poet but Shakespeare, that none of the characters represented should be capable of securing or even exciting any finer sympathy or more serious interest than attends on the mere evolution of successive events or the mere display of emotions (except always in the great scene of the deposition) rather animal than spiritual in their expression of rage or tenderness or suffering. The exact balance of mutual effect, the final note of scenic harmony between ideal conception and

realistic execution, is not yet struck with perfect accuracy of touch and security of hand; but on this point also Marlowe has here come nearer by many degrees to Shakespeare than any of his other predecessors have ever come near to Marlowe.

Of 'The Massacre at Paris' it is impossible to judge fairly from the garbled fragment of its genuine text which is all that has come down to us. To Mr. Collier, among numberless other obligations, we owe the discovery of a striking passage excised in the piratical edition which gives us the only version extant of this unlucky play; and which, it must be allowed, contains nothing of quite equal value. This is obviously an occasional and polemical work, and being as it is overcharged with the anti-Catholic passion of the time, has a typical quality which gives it some empirical significance and interest. That anti-papal ardour is indeed the only note of unity in a rough and ragged chronicle which shambles and stumbles onward from the death of Queen Jeanne of Navarre to the murder of the last Valois. It is possible to conjecture what it would be fruitless to affirm, that it gave a hint in the next century to Nathaniel Lee for his far superior and really admirable tragedy on the same subject, issued ninety-seven years after the death of Marlowe.

The tragedy of 'Dido, Queen of Carthage,' was probably completed for the stage after that irreparable and incalculable loss to English letters by Thomas Nash, the worthiest English precursor of Swift in vivid, pure, and passionate prose, embodying the most terrible and splendid qualities of a personal and social satirist; a man gifted also with some fair faculty of elegiac and even lyric verse, but in no wise qualified to put on the buskin left behind him by the 'famous gracer of tragedians,' as Marlowe had already been designated by their common friend Greene from among the worthiest of his fellows. In this somewhat thin-spun and evidently hasty play a servile fidelity to the text of Virgil's narrative has naturally resulted in the failure which might have been expected from an attempt at once to transcribe what is essentially inimitable and to reproduce it under the hopelessly alien conditions of dramatic adaptation. The one really noble passage in a generally feeble and incomposite piece of work is, however, uninspired by the unattainable model to which the dramatists have been only too obsequious in their subservience.

It is as nearly certain as anything can be which depends chiefly upon cumulative and collateral evidence that the better part of what is best in the serious scenes of 'King Henry VI.' is

mainly the work of Marlowe. That he is, at any rate, the principal author of the second and third plays passing under that name among the works of Shakespeare, but first and imperfectly printed as 'The Contention between the two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster,' can hardly be now a matter of debate among competent judges. The crucial difficulty of criticism in this matter is to determine, if indeed we should not rather say to conjecture, the authorship of the humorous scenes in prose, showing as they generally do a power of comparatively high and pure comic realism to which nothing in the acknowledged works of any pre-Shakespearean dramatist is even remotely comparable. Yet, especially in the original text of these scenes as they stand unpurified by the ultimate revision of Shakespeare, there are tones and touches which recall rather the clownish horseplay and homely ribaldry of his predecessors than anything in the lighter interludes of his very earliest plays. We find the same sort of thing which we find in their writings, only better done than they usually do it, rather than such work as Shakespeare's a little worse done than usual. And even in the final text of the tragic or metrical scenes the highest note struck is always, with one magnificent and unquestionable exception, rather in the key of

Marlowe at his best than of Shakespeare while yet in great measure his disciple.

It is another commonplace of criticism to affirm that Marlowe had not a touch of comic genius, not a gleam of wit in him or a twinkle of humour: but it is an indisputable fact that he had. In 'The Massacre at Paris,' the soliloquy of the soldier lying in wait for the minion of Henri III. has the same very rough but very real humour as a passage in the 'Contention' which was cancelled by the reviser. The same hand is unmistakable in both these broad and boyish outbreaks of unseemly but undeniable fun: and if we might wish it rather less indecorous, we must admit that the tradition which denies all sense of humour and all instinct of wit to the first great poet of England is no less unworthy of serious notice or elaborate refutation than the charges and calumnies of an informer who was duly hanged the year after Marlowe's death. For if the same note of humour is struck in an undoubted play of Marlowe's and in a play of disputed authorship, it is evident that the rest of the scene in the latter play must also be Marlowe's. And in that unquestionable case the superb and savage humour of the terribly comic scenes which represent with such rough magnificence of realism the riot of Jack Cade and his ruffians through the

ravaged streets of London must be recognisable as no other man's than his. It is a pity we have not before us for comparison the comic scenes or burlesque interludes of 'Tamburlaine' which the printer or publisher, as he had the impudence to avow in his prefatory note, purposely omitted and left out.

The author of 'A Study of Shakespeare' was therefore wrong, and utterly wrong, when in a book issued some quarter of a century ago he followed the lead of Mr. Dyce in assuming that because the author of 'Doctor Faustus' and 'The Jew of Malta' 'was as certainly'—and certainly it is difficult to deny that whether as a mere transcriber or as an original dealer in pleasantry he sometimes was—'one of the least and worst among jesters as he was one of the best and greatest among poets,' he could not have had a hand in the admirable comic scenes of 'The Taming of a Shrew.' For it is now, I should hope, unnecessary to insist that the able and conscientious editor to whom his fame and his readers owe so great a debt was over hasty in assuming and asserting that he was a poet 'to whom, we have reason to believe, nature had denied even a moderate talent for the humorous.' The serious or would-be poetical scenes of the play are as unmistakably the work of an imitator as are most of the better

passages in 'Titus Andronicus' and 'King Edward III.' Greene or Peele may be responsible for the bad poetry, but there is no reason to suppose that the great poet whose mannerisms he imitated with so stupid a servility was incapable of the good fun.

Had every copy of Marlowe's boyish version or perversion of Ovid's 'Elegies' deservedly perished in the flames to which it was judicially condemned by the sentence of a brace of prelates, it is possible that an occasional bookworm, it is certain that no poetical student, would have deplored its destruction, if its demerits—hardly relieved, as his first competent editor has happily remarked, by the occasional incidence of a fine and felicitous couplet—could in that case have been imagined. His translation of the first book of Lucan alternately rises above the original and falls short of it; often inferior to the Latin in point and weight of expressive rhetoric, now and then brightened by a clearer note of poetry and lifted into a higher mood of verse. Its terseness, vigour, and purity of style would in any case have been praiseworthy, but are nothing less than admirable, if not wonderful, when we consider how close the translator has on the whole (in spite of occasional slips into inaccuracy) kept himself to the most rigid limit of literal representation, phrase

by phrase and often line by line. The really startling force and felicity of occasional verses are worthier of remark than the inevitable stiffness and heaviness of others, when the technical difficulty of such a task is duly taken into account.

One of the most faultless lyrics and one of the loveliest fragments in the whole range of descriptive and fanciful poetry would have secured a place for Marlowe among the memorable men of his epoch, even if his plays had perished with himself. His 'Passionate Shepherd' remains ever since unrivalled in its way—a way of pure fancy and radiant melody without break or lapse. The untitled fragment, on the other hand, has been very closely rivalled, perhaps very happily imitated, but only by the greatest lyric poet of England—by Shelley alone. Marlowe's poem of 'Hero and Leander,' closing with the sunrise which closes the night of the lovers' union, stands alone in its age, and far ahead of the work of any possible competitor between the death of Spenser and the dawn of Milton. In clear mastery of narrative and presentation, in melodious ease and simplicity of strength, it is not less pre-eminent than in the adorable beauty and impeccable perfection of separate lines or passages.

The place and the value of Christopher Marlowe as a leader among English poets it would be almost

impossible for historical criticism to over-estimate. To none of them all, perhaps, have so many of the greatest among them been so deeply and so directly indebted. Nor was ever any great writer's influence upon his fellows more utterly and unmixedly an influence for good. He first, and he alone, guided Shakespeare into the right way of work ; his music, in which there is no echo of any man's before him, found its own echo in the more prolonged but hardly more exalted harmony of Milton's. He is the greatest discoverer, the most daring and inspired pioneer, in all our poetic literature. Before him there was neither genuine blank verse nor genuine tragedy in our language. After his arrival the way was prepared, the paths were made straight, for Shakespeare.

JOHN WEBSTER

THERE were many poets in the age of Shakespeare who make us think, as we read them, that the characters in their plays could not have spoken more beautifully, more powerfully, more effectively, under the circumstances imagined for the occasion of their utterance: there are only two who make us feel that the words assigned to the creatures of their genius are the very words they must have said, the only words they could have said, the actual words they assuredly did say. Mere literary power, mere poetic beauty, mere charm of passionate or pathetic fancy, we find in varying degrees dispersed among them all alike; but the crowning gift of imagination, the power to make us realise that thus and not otherwise it was, that thus and not otherwise it must have been, was given—except by exceptional fits and starts—to none of the poets of their time but only to Shakespeare and to Webster.

Webster, it may be said, was but as it were a limb of Shakespeare: but that limb, it might be

replied, was the right arm. 'The kingly-crownèd head, the vigilant eye,' whose empire of thought and whose reach of vision no other man's faculty has ever been found competent to match, are Shakespeare's alone for ever: but the force of hand, the fire of heart, the fervour of pity, the sympathy of passion, not poetic or theatric merely, but actual and immediate, are qualities in which the lesser poet is not less certainly or less unmistakably pre-eminent than the greater. And there is no third to be set beside them: not even if we turn from their contemporaries to Shelley himself. All that Beatrice says in 'The Cenci' is beautiful and conceivable and admirable: but unless we except her exquisite last words—and even they are more beautiful than inevitable—we shall hardly find what we find in 'King Lear' and 'The White Devil,' 'Othello' and 'The Duchess of Malfy'; the tone of convincing reality; the note, as a critic of our own day might call it, of certitude.

There are poets—in our own age, as in all past ages—from whose best work it might be difficult to choose at a glance some verse sufficient to establish their claim—great as their claim may be—to be remembered for ever; and who yet may be worthy of remembrance among all but the highest. Webster is not one of these: though his fame assuredly does not depend upon the merit of

a casual passage here or there, it would be easy to select from any one of his representative plays such examples of the highest, the purest, the most perfect power, as can be found only in the works of the greatest among poets. There is not, as far as my studies have ever extended, a third English poet to whom these words might rationally be attributed by the conjecture of a competent reader.

> We cease to grieve, cease to be fortune's slaves,
> Nay, cease to die, by dying.

There is a depth of severe sense in them, a height of heroic scorn, or a dignity of quiet cynicism, which can scarcely be paralleled in the bitterest or the fiercest effusions of John Marston or Cyril Tourneur or Jonathan Swift. Nay, were they not put into the mouth of a criminal cynic, they would not seem unworthy of Epictetus. There is nothing so grand in the part of Edmund; the one figure in Shakespeare whose aim in life, whose centre of character, is one with the view or the instinct of Webster's two typical villains. Some touches in the part of Flamineo suggest, if not a conscious imitation, an unconscious reminiscence of that prototype: but the essential and radical originality of Webster's genius is shown in the difference of accent with which the same savage and sarcastic philosophy of self-interest finds expression through the snarl and

sneer of his ambitious cynic. Monsters as they may seem of unnatural egotism and unallayed ferocity, the one who dies penitent, though his repentance be as sudden if not as suspicious as any ever wrought by miraculous conversion, dies as thoroughly in character as the one who takes leave of life in a passion of scorn and defiant irony which hardly passes off at last into a mood of mocking and triumphant resignation. There is a cross of heroism in almost all Webster's characters which preserves the worst of them from such hatefulness as disgusts us in certain of Fletcher's or of Ford's: they have in them some salt of manhood, some savour of venturesome and humorous resolution, which reminds us of the heroic age in which the genius that begot them was born and reared —the age of Richard Grenville and Francis Drake, Philip Sidney and William Shakespeare.

The earliest play of Webster's now surviving —if a work so piteously mutilated and defaced can properly be said to survive—is a curious example of the combined freedom and realism with which recent or even contemporary history was habitually treated on the stage during the last years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The noblest poem known to me of this peculiar kind is the play of 'Sir Thomas More,' first printed by Mr. Dyce in 1844 for the Shakespeare Society:

the worst must almost certainly be that 'Chronicle History of Thomas Lord Cromwell' which the infallible verdict of German intuition has discovered to be 'not only unquestionably Shakespeare's, but worthy to be classed among his best and maturest works.' About midway between these two I should be inclined to rank 'The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt,' a mangled and deformed abridgment of a tragedy by Dekker and Webster on the story of Lady Jane Grey. In this tragedy, as in the two comedies due to the collaboration of the same poets, it appears to me more than probable that Dekker took decidedly the greater part. The shambling and slipshod metre, which seems now and then to hit by mere chance on some pure and tender note of simple and exquisite melody—the lazy vivacity and impulsive inconsequence of style—the fitful sort of slovenly inspiration, with interludes of absolute and headlong collapse—are qualities by which a very novice in the study of dramatic form may recognise the reckless and unmistakable presence of Dekker. The curt and grim precision of Webster's tone, his terse and pungent force of compressed rhetoric, will be found equally difficult to trace in any of these three plays. 'Northward Ho,' a clever, coarse, and vigorous study of the realistic sort, has not a note of poetry in it, but is

more coherent, more sensibly conceived and more ably constructed, than the rambling history of Wyatt or the hybrid amalgam of prosaic and romantic elements in the compound comedy of 'Westward Ho.' All that is of any great value in this amorphous and incongruous product of inventive impatience and impetuous idleness can be as distinctly traced to the hand of Dekker as the crowning glories of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' can be traced to the hand of Shakespeare. Any poet, even of his time, might have been proud of these verses, but the accent of them is unmistakable as that of Dekker.

> Go, let music
> Charm with her excellent voice an awful silence
> Through all this building, that her sphery soul
> May, on the wings of air, in thousand forms
> Invisibly fly, yet be enjoyed.

This delicate fluency and distilled refinement of expression ought properly, one would say, to have belonged to a poet of such careful and self-respectful genius as Tennyson's: whereas in the very next speech of the same speaker we stumble over such a phrase as that which closes the following sentence:—

> We feed, wear rich attires, and strive to cleave
> The stars with marble towers, fight battles, spend
> Our blood to buy us names, *and, in iron hold,*
> *Will we eat roots, to imprison fugitive gold.*

Which he who can parse, let him scan, and he who can scan, let him construe. It is alike incredible and certain that the writer of such exquisite and blameless verse as that in which the finer scenes of 'Old Fortunatus' and 'The Honest Whore' are so smoothly and simply and naturally written should have been capable of writing whole plays in this headlong and halting fashion, as helpless and graceless as the action of a spavined horse, or a cripple who should attempt to run.

It is difficult to say what part of these plays should be assigned to Webster. Their rough realistic humour, with its tone of somewhat coarse-grained good-nature, strikes the habitual note of Dekker's comic style: there is nothing of the fierce and scornful intensity, the ardour of passionate and compressed contempt, which distinguishes the savagely humorous satire of Webster and of Marston, and makes it hopeless to determine by intrinsic evidence how little or how much was added by Webster in the second edition to the original text of Marston's 'Malcontent': unless—which appears to me not unreasonable—we assume that the printer of that edition lied or blundered after the manner of his contemporary kind in attributing on the title-page—as apparently he meant to attribute—any share in the additional scenes or speeches to the original author of the

play. In any case, the passages thus added to that grimmest and most sombre of tragicomedies are in such exact keeping with the previous text that the keenest scent of the veriest bloodhound among critics could not detect a shade of difference in the savour.

The text of either comedy is generally very fair—as free from corruption as could reasonably be expected. The text of 'Sir Thomas Wyatt' is corrupt as well as mutilated. Even in Mr. Dyce's second edition I have noted, not without astonishment, the following flagrant errors left still to glare on us from the distorted and disfigured page. In the sixth scene a single speech of Arundel's contains two of the most palpably preposterous :—

> The obligation wherein we all stood bound
> . . . . . .
> Cannot be concealed without great reproach
> To us and to our issue.

We should of course read 'cancelled' for 'concealed': the sense of the context and the exigence of the verse cry alike aloud for the correction. In the sixteenth line from this we come upon an equally obvious error :—

> Advice in this I hold it better far,
> To keep the course we run, than, seeking change,
> Hazard our lives, our honours, and the realm.

It seems hardly credible to those who are aware how much they owe to the excellent scholarship and editorial faculty of Mr. Dyce, that he should have allowed such a misprint as 'heirs' for 'honours' to stand in this last unlucky line. Again, in the next scene, when the popular leader Captain Brett attempts to reassure the country folk who are startled at the sight of his insurgent array, he is made to utter (in reply to the exclamation, 'What's here? soldiers!') the perfectly fatuous phrase, 'Fear not good speech.' Of course—once more—we should read, 'Fear not, good people'; a correction which rectifies the metre as well as the sense.

The play attributed to Webster and Rowley by a publisher of the next generation has been carefully and delicately analysed by a critic of our own time, who naturally finds it easy to distinguish the finer from the homelier part of the compound weft, and to assign what is rough and crude to the inferior, what is interesting and graceful to the superior poet. The authority of the rogue Kirkman may be likened to the outline or profile of Mr. Mantalini's early loves: it is either no authority at all, or at best it is a 'demd' authority. The same swindler who assigned to Webster and Rowley the authorship of 'A Cure for a Cuckold' assigned to Shakespeare and Rowley the authorship of an infinitely

inferior play—a play of which German sagacity has discovered that 'none of Rowley's other works are equal to this.' Assuredly they are not—in utter stolidity of platitude and absolute impotence of drivel. Rowley was a vigorous artist in comedy and an original master of tragedy: he may have written the lighter or broader parts of the play which rather unluckily took its name from these, and Webster may have written the more serious or sentimental parts: but there is not the slightest shadow of a reason to suppose it. An obviously apocryphal abortion of the same date, attributed to the same poets by the same knave, has long since been struck off the roll of Webster's works.

The few occasional poems of this great poet are worth study by those who are capable of feeling interest in the comparison of slighter with sublimer things, and the detection in minor works of the same style, here revealed by fitful hints in casual phrases, as that which animates and distinguishes even a work so insufficient and incompetent as Webster's 'tragecomœdy' of 'The Devil's Law-case.' The noble and impressive extracts from this most incoherent and chaotic of all plays which must be familiar to all students of Charles Lamb are but patches of imperial purple sewn on with the roughest of needles to a garment of the raggedest and coarsest kind of literary serge.

Hardly any praise can be too high for their dignity and beauty, their lofty loyalty and simplicity of chivalrous manhood or their deep sincerity of cynic meditation and self-contemptuous mournfulness: and the reader who turns from these magnificent samples to the complete play must expect to find yet another and a yet unknown masterpiece of English tragedy. He will find a crowning example of the famous theorem, that 'the plot is of no use except to bring in the fine things.' The plot is in this instance absurd to a degree so far beyond the most preposterous conception of confused and distracting extravagance that the reader's attention may at times be withdrawn from the all but unqualified ugliness of its ethical tone or tendency. Two of Webster's favourite types, the meditative murderer or philosophic ruffian, and the impulsive impostor who is liable to collapse into the likeness of a passionate penitent, will remind the reader how much better they appear in tragedies which are carried through to their natural tragic end. But here, where the story is admirably opened and the characters as skilfully introduced, the strong interest thus excited at starting is scattered or broken or trifled away before the action is halfway through: and at its close the awkward violence or irregularity of moral and scenical effect comes to a crowning crisis in

the general and mutual condonation of unnatural perjury and attempted murder with which the victims and the criminals agree to hush up all grudges, shake hands all round, and live happy ever after. There is at least one point of somewhat repulsive resemblance between the story of this play and that of Fletcher's 'Fair Maid of the Inn': but Fletcher's play, with none of the tragic touches or interludes of superb and sombre poetry which relieve the incoherence of Webster's, is better laid out and constructed, more amusing if not more interesting and more intelligent if not more imaginative.

A far more creditable and workmanlike piece of work, though glorified by no flashes of such sudden and singular beauty, is the tragedy of 'Appius and Virginia.' The almost infinite superiority of Webster to Fletcher as a poet of pure tragedy and a painter of masculine character is in this play as obvious as the inferiority in construction and conduct of romantic story displayed in his attempt at a tragicomedy. From the evidence of style I should judge this play to have been written at an earlier date than 'The Devil's Lawcase': it is, I repeat, far better composed; better, perhaps, than any other play of the author's: but it has none of his more distinctive qualities; intensity of idea, concentration of utterance, pun-

gency of expression and ardour of pathos. It is written with noble and equable power of hand, with force and purity and fluency of apt and simple eloquence: there is nothing in it unworthy of the writer: but it is the only one of his unassisted works in which we do not find that especial note of tragic style, concise and pointed and tipped as it were with fire, which usually makes it impossible for the dullest reader to mistake the peculiar presence, the original tone or accent, of John Webster. If the epithet unique had not such a tang of German affectation in it, it would be perhaps the aptest of all adjectives to denote the genius or define the manner of this great poet. But in this tragedy, though whatever is said is well said and whatever is done well done, we miss that sense of positive and inevitable conviction, that instant and profound perception or impression as of immediate and indisputable truth, which is burnt in upon us as we read the more Websterian scenes of Webster's writing. We feel, in short, that thus it may have been: not, as I observed at the opening of these notes, that thus it must have been. The poem does him no discredit; nay, it does him additional honour, as an evidence of powers more various and many-sided than we should otherwise have known or supposed in him. Indeed, the figure of Virginius is one of the finest types of soldierly and fatherly

heroism ever presented on the stage: there is equal force of dramatic effect, equal fervour of eloquent passion, in the scene of his pleading before the senate on behalf of the claims of his suffering and struggling fellow-soldiers, and in the scene of his return to the camp after the immolation of his daughter. The mere theatric effect of this latter scene is at once so triumphant and so dignified, so noble in its presentation and so passionate in its restraint, that we feel the high justice and sound reason of the instinct which inspired the poet to prolong the action of his play so far beyond the sacrifice of his heroine. A comparison of Webster's Virginius with any of Fletcher's wordy warriors will suffice to show how much nearer to Shakespeare than to Fletcher stands Webster as a tragic or a serious dramatist. Coleridge, not always just to Fletcher, was not unjust in his remark 'what strange self-trumpeters and tongue-bullies all the brave soldiers of Beaumont and Fletcher are'; and again almost immediately—'all B. and F.'s generals are pugilists, or cudgel-fighters, that boast of their bottom and of the "claret" they have shed.' There is nothing of this in Virginius; Shakespeare himself has not represented with a more lofty fidelity, in the person of Coriolanus or of Brutus, 'the high Roman fashion' of austere and heroic self-respect. In the other leading or

dominant figure of this tragedy there is certainly discernible a genuine and thoughtful originality or freshness of conception; but perhaps there is also recognisable a certain inconsistency of touch. It was well thought of to mingle some alloy of goodness with the wickedness of Appius Claudius, to represent the treacherous and lecherous decemvir as neither kindless nor remorseless, but capable of penitence and courage in his last hour. But Shakespeare, I cannot but think, would have prepared us with more care and more dexterity for the revelation of some such redeeming quality in a character which in the act immediately preceding Webster has represented as utterly heartless and shameless, brutal in its hypocrisy and impudent in its brutality.

If the works already discussed were their author's only claims to remembrance and honour, they might not suffice to place him on a higher level among our tragic poets than that occupied by Marston and Dekker and Middleton on the one hand, by Fletcher and Massinger and Shirley on the other. 'Antonio and Mellida,' 'Old Fortunatus, or 'The Changeling'—'The Maid's Tragedy,' 'The Duke of Milan,' or 'The Traitor'—would suffice to counterweigh (if not, in some cases, to outbalance) the merit of the best among these: the fitful and futile inspiration of 'The Devil's Law-

case,' and the stately but subdued inspiration of 'Appius and Virginia.' That his place was with no subordinate poet—that his station is at Shakespeare's right hand—the evidence supplied by his two great tragedies is disputable by no one who has an inkling of the qualities which confer a right to be named in the same day with the greatest writer of all time.

Æschylus is above all things the poet of righteousness. 'But in any wise, I say unto thee, revere thou the altar of righteousness': this is the crowning admonition of his doctrine, as its crowning prospect is the reconciliation or atonement of the principle of retribution with the principle of redemption, of the powers of the mystery of darkness with the coeternal forces of the spirit of wisdom, of the lord of inspiration and of light. The doctrine of Shakespeare, where it is not vaguer, is darker in its implication of injustice, in its acceptance of accident, than the impression of the doctrine of Æschylus. Fate, irreversible and inscrutable, is the only force of which we feel the impact, of which we trace the sign, in the upshot of 'Othello' or 'King Lear.' The last step into the darkness remained to be taken by 'the most tragic' of all English poets. With Shakespeare—and assuredly not with Æschylus—righteousness itself seems subject and subordinate to the master-

dom of fate: but fate itself, in the tragic world of Webster, seems merely the servant or the synonym of chance. The two chief agents in his two great tragedies pass away—the phrase was, perhaps, unconsciously repeated—'in a mist': perplexed, indomitable, defiant of hope and fear; bitter and sceptical and bloody in penitence or impenitence alike. And the mist which encompasses the departing spirits of these moody and mocking men of blood seems equally to involve the lives of their chastisers and their victims. Blind accident and blundering mishap—'such a mistake,' says one of the criminals, 'as I have often seen in a play'—are the steersmen of their fortunes and the doomsmen of their deeds. The effect of this method or the result of this view, whether adopted for dramatic objects or ingrained in the writer's temperament, is equally fit for pure tragedy and unfit for any form of drama not purely tragic in evolution and event. In 'The Devil's Law-case' it is offensive, because the upshot is incongruous and insufficient: in 'The White Devil' and 'The Duchess of Malfy' it is admirable, because the results are adequate and coherent. But in all these three plays alike, and in these three plays only, the peculiar tone of Webster's genius, the peculiar force of his imagination, is distinct and absolute in its fullness of effect. The author of

'Appius and Virginia' would have earned an honourable and enduring place in the history of English letters as a worthy member—one among many—of a great school in poetry, a deserving representative of a great epoch in literature: but the author of these three plays has a solitary station, an indisputable distinction of his own. The greatest poets of all time are not more mutually independent than this one—a lesser poet only than those greatest—is essentially independent of them all.

The first quality which all readers recognise, and which may strike a superficial reader as the exclusive or excessive note of his genius and his work, is of course his command of terror. Except in Æschylus, in Dante, and in Shakespeare, I at least know not where to seek for passages which in sheer force of tragic and noble horror—to the vulgar shock of ignoble or brutal horror he never condescends to submit his reader or subdue his inspiration—may be set against the subtlest, the deepest, the sublimest passages of Webster. Other gifts he had as great in themselves, as precious and as necessary to the poet: but on this side he is incomparable and unique. Neither Marlowe nor Shakespeare had so fine, so accurate, so infallible a sense of the delicate line of demarcation which divides the impressive and the terrible from the horrible and the loathsome—Victor Hugo and

Honoré de Balzac from Eugène Sue and Émile Zola. On his theatre we find no presentation of old men with their beards torn off and their eyes gouged out, of young men imprisoned in reeking cesspools and impaled with red-hot spits. Again and again his passionate and daring genius attains the utmost limit and rounds the final goal of tragedy; never once does it break the bounds of pure poetic instinct. If ever for a moment it may seem to graze that goal too closely, to brush too sharply by those bounds, the very next moment finds it clear of any such risk and remote from any such temptation as sometimes entrapped or seduced the foremost of its forerunners in the field. And yet this is the field in which its paces are most superbly shown. No name among all the names of great poets will recur so soon as Webster's to the reader who knows what it signifies, as he reads or repeats the verses in which a greater than this great poet—a greater than all since Shakespeare—has expressed the latent mystery of terror which lurks in all the highest poetry or beauty, and distinguishes it inexplicably and inevitably from all that is but a little lower than the highest.

Les aigles sur les bords du Gange et du Caÿstre
Sont effrayants;
Rien de grand qui ne soit confusément sinistre;
Les noirs pæans,

Les psaumes, la chanson monstrueuse du mage
Ezéchiel,
Font devant notre œil fixe errer la vague image
D'un affreux ciel.

L'empyrée est l'abîme, on y plonge, on y reste
Avec terreur.
Car planer, c'est trembler ; si l'azur est céleste,
C'est par l'horreur.

L'épouvante est au fond des choses les plus belles ;
Les bleus vallons
Font parfois reculer d'effroi les fauves ailes
Des aquilons.

And even in comedy as in tragedy, in prosaic even as in prophetic inspiration, in imitative as in imaginative works of genius, the sovereign of modern poets has detected the same touch of terror wherever the deepest note possible has been struck, the fullest sense possible of genuine and peculiar power conveyed to the student of lyric or dramatic, epic or elegiac masters.

De là tant de beautés difformes dans leurs œuvres ;
Le vers charmant
Est par la torsion subite des couleuvres
Pris brusquement ;

À de certains moments toutes les jeunes flores
Dans la forêt
Ont peur, et sur le front des blanches métaphores
L'ombre apparaît ;

C'est qu'Horace ou Virgile ont vu soudain le spectre
Noir se dresser;
C'est que là-bas, derrière Amaryllis, Electre
Vient de passer.

Nor was it the Electra of Sophocles, the calm and impassive accomplice of an untroubled and unhesitating matricide, who showed herself ever in passing to the intent and serious vision of Webster. By those candid and sensible judges to whom the praise of Marlowe seems to imply a reflection on the fame of Shakespeare, I may be accused—and by such critics I am content to be accused—of a fatuous design to set Webster beside Sophocles, or Sophocles—for aught I know—beneath Webster, if I venture to indicate the superiority in truth of natural passion—and, I must add, of moral instinct—which distinguishes the modern from the ancient. It is not, it never will be, and it never can have been natural for noble and civilised creatures to accept with spontaneous complacency, to discharge with unforced equanimity, such offices or such duties as weigh so lightly on the spirit of the Sophoclean Orestes that the slaughter of a mother seems to be a less serious undertaking for his unreluctant hand than the subsequent execution of her paramour. The immeasurable superiority of Æschylus to his successors in this quality of instinctive righteousness—if a word long vul-

garised by theology may yet be used in its just and natural sense—is shared no less by Webster than by Shakespeare. The grave and deep truth of natural impulse is never ignored by these poets when dealing either with innocent or with criminal passion: but it surely is now and then ignored by the artistic quietism of Sophocles—as surely as it is outraged and degraded by the vulgar theatricalities of Euripides. Thomas Campbell was amused and scandalised by the fact that Webster (as he is pleased to express it) modestly compares himself to the playwright last mentioned; being apparently of opinion that 'Hippolytus' and 'Medea' may be reckoned equal or superior, as works of tragic art or examples of ethical elevation, to 'The White Devil' and 'The Duchess of Malfy'; and being no less apparently ignorant, and incapable of understanding, that as there is no poet morally nobler than Webster so is there no poet ignobler in the moral sense than Euripides: while as a dramatic artist—an artist in character, action, and emotion—the degenerate tragedian of Athens, compared to the second tragic dramatist of England, is as a mutilated monkey to a well-made man. No better test of critical faculty could be required by the most exacting scrutiny of probation than is afforded by the critic's professed or professional estimate of those great poets whose

names are not consecrated—or desecrated—by the conventional applause, the factitious adoration, of a tribunal whose judgments are dictated by obsequious superstition and unanimous incompetence. When certain critics inform a listening world that they do not admire Marlowe and Webster—they admire Shakespeare and Milton, we know at once that it is not the genius of Shakespeare—it is the reputation of Shakespeare that they admire. It is not the man that they bow down to: it is the bust that they crouch down before. They would worship Shirley as soon as Shakespeare—Glover as soon as Milton—Byron as soon as Shelley—Ponsard as soon as Hugo—Longfellow as soon as Tennyson—if the tablet were as showily emblazoned, the inscription as pretentiously engraved.

The nobility of spirit and motive which is so distinguishing a mark of Webster's instinctive genius or natural disposition of mind is proved by his treatment of facts placed on record by contemporary annalists in the tragic story of Vittoria Accorambuoni, Duchess of Bracciano. That story would have been suggestive, if not tempting, to any dramatic poet: and almost any poet but Shakespeare or Webster would have been content to accept the characters and circumstances as they stood nakedly on record, and adapt them to the contemporary stage of England with such dexterity

and intelligence as he might be able to command. But, as Shakespeare took the savage legend of Hamlet, the brutal story of Othello, and raised them from the respective levels of the Heimskringla and the Newgate Calendar to the very highest 'heaven of invention,' so has Webster transmuted the impressive but repulsive record of villainies and atrocities, in which he discovered the motive for a magnificent poem, into the majestic and pathetic masterpiece which is one of the most triumphant and the most memorable achievements of English poetry. If, in his play, as in the legal or historic account of the affair, the whole family of the heroine had appeared unanimous and eager in complicity with her sins and competition for a share in the profits of her dishonour, the tragedy might still have been as effective as it is now from the theatrical or sensational point of view; it might have thrilled the reader's nerves as keenly, have excited and stimulated his curiosity, have whetted and satiated his appetite for transient emotion, as thoroughly and triumphantly as now. But it would have been merely a criminal melodrama, compiled by the labour and vivified by the talent of an able theatrical journeyman. The one great follower of Shakespeare—'haud passibus æquis' at all points; 'longo sed proximus intervallo'—has recognised, with Shakespearean accu-

racy and delicacy and elevation of instinct, the necessity of ennobling and transfiguring his characters if their story was to be made acceptable to the sympathies of any but an idle or an ignoble audience. And he has done so after the very manner and in the very spirit of Shakespeare. The noble creatures of his invention give to the story that dignity and variety of interest without which the most powerful romance or drama can be but an example of vigorous vulgarity. The upright and high-minded mother and brother of the shameless Flamineo and the shame-stricken Vittoria refresh and purify the tragic atmosphere of the poem by the passing presence of their virtues. The shallow and fiery nature of the fair White Devil herself is a notable example of the difference so accurately distinguished by Charlotte Brontë between an impressionable and an impressible character. Ambition, self-interest, passion, remorse and hardihood alternate and contend in her impetuous and wayward spirit. The one distinct and trustworthy quality which may always be reckoned on is the indomitable courage underlying her easily irritable emotions. Her bearing at the trial for her husband's murder is as dexterous and dauntless as the demeanour of Mary Stuart before her judges. To Charles Lamb it seemed 'an innocence-resembling boldness'; to Mr. Dyce

and Canon Kingsley the innocence displayed in Lamb's estimate seemed almost ludicrous in its misconception of Webster's text. I should hesitate to agree with them that he has never once made his accused heroine speak in the natural key of innocence unjustly impeached: Mary's pleading for her life is not at all points incompatible in tone with the innocence which it certainly fails to establish—except in minds already made up to accept any plea as valid which may plausibly or possibly be advanced on her behalf; and the arguments advanced by Vittoria are not more evasive and equivocal, in face of the patent and flagrant prepossession of her judges, than those put forward by the Queen of Scots. It is impossible not to wonder whether the poet had not in his mind the actual tragedy which had taken place just twenty-five years before the publication of this play: if not, the coincidence is something more than singular. The fierce profligacy and savage egotism of Brachiano have a certain energy and activity in the display and the development of their motives and effects which suggest rather such a character as Bothwell's than such a character as that of the bloated and stolid sensualist who stands or grovels before us in the historic record of his life. As presented by

Webster, he is doubtless an execrable ruffian: as presented by history, he would be intolerable by any but such readers or spectators as those on whom the figments or the photographs of self-styled naturalism produce other than emetic emotions. Here again the noble instinct of the English poet has rectified the æsthetic unseemliness of an ignoble reality. This 'Brachiano' is a far more living figure than the porcine paramour of the historic Accorambuoni. I am not prepared to maintain that in one scene too much has not been sacrificed to immediate vehemence of effect. The devotion of the discarded wife, who to shelter her Antony from the vengeance of Octavius assumes the mask of raging jealousy, thus taking upon herself the blame and responsibility of their final separation, is expressed with such consummate and artistic simplicity of power that on a first reading the genius of the dramatist may well blind us to the violent unlikelihood of the action. But this very extravagance of self-sacrifice may be thought by some to add a crowning touch of pathos to the unsurpassable beauty of the scene in which her child, after the murder of his mother, relates her past sufferings to his uncle. Those to whom the great name of Webster represents merely an artist in horrors, a ruffian of genius, may be

recommended to study every line and syllable of this brief dialogue.

Francisco. How now, my noble cousin? what, in black?
Giovanni. Yes, uncle, I was taught to imitate you
In virtue, and you [? now] must imitate me
In colours of your garments. My sweet mother
Is—
Francisco. How! where?
Giovanni. Is there; no, yonder: indeed, sir, I'll not tell you,
For I shall make you weep.
Francisco. Is dead?
Giovanni. Do not blame me now,
I did not tell you so.
Lodovico. She's dead, my lord.
Francisco. Dead!
Monticelso. Blest lady, thou art now above thy woes!
. . . . . .
Giovanni. What do the dead do, uncle? do they eat,
Hear music, go a hunting, and be merry,
As we that live?
Francisco. No, coz; they sleep.
Giovanni. Lord, Lord, that I were dead!
I have not slept these six nights.—When do they wake?
Francisco. When God shall please.
Giovanni. Good God, let her sleep ever!
For I have known her wake an hundred nights
When all the pillow where she laid her head
Was brine-wet with her tears. I am to complain to you, sir;
I'll tell you how they have used her now she's dead:
They wrapped her in a cruel fold of lead,
And would not let me kiss her.

Francisco. Thou didst love her.
Giovanni. I have often heard her say she gave me suck,
And it should seem by that she dearly loved me,
Since princes seldom do it.
Francisco. O, all of my poor sister that remains!—
Take him away, for God's sake!

I must admit that I do not see how Shakespeare could have improved upon that. It seems to me that in any one of even his greatest tragedies this scene would have been remarkable among its most beautiful and perfect passages; nor, upon the whole, do I remember a third English poet who could be imagined capable of having written it. And it affords, I think, very clear and sufficient evidence that Webster could not have handled so pathetic and suggestive a subject as the execution of Lady Jane Grey and her young husband in a style so thin and feeble, so shallow in expression of pathos and so empty of suggestion or of passion, as that in which it is presented at the close of 'Sir Thomas Wyatt.'

There is a perfect harmony of contrast between this and the death-scene of the boy's father: the agony of the murdered murderer is as superb in effect of terror as the sorrow of his son is exquisite in effect of pathos. Again we are reminded of Shakespeare, by no touch of imitation but simply by a note of kinship in genius and in style, at the

cry of Brachiano under the first sharp workings of the poison :

O thou strong heart !
There's such a covenant 'tween the world and it,
They're loth to break.

Another stroke well worthy of Shakespeare is the redeeming touch of grace in this brutal and cold-blooded ruffian which gives him in his agony a thought of tender care for the accomplice of his atrocities :

Do not kiss me, for I shall poison thee.

Few instances of Webster's genius are so well known as the brief but magnificent passage which follows ; yet it may not be impertinent to cite it once again.

Brachiano. O thou soft natural death, that art joint twin
To sweetest slumber ! no rough-bearded comet
Stares on thy mild departure ; the dull owl
Beats not against thy casement ; the hoarse wolf
Scents not thy carrion ; pity winds thy corpse,
Whilst horror waits on princes.
Vittoria. I am lost for ever.
Brachiano. How miserable a thing it is to die
'Mongst women howling !—What are those ?
Flamineo. Franciscans :
They have brought the extreme unction.
Brachiano. On pain of death, let no man name death to me ;
It is a word [? most] infinitely terrible.

The very tremor of moral and physical abjection from nervous defiance into prostrate fear which seems to pant and bluster and quail and subside in the natural cadence of these lines would suffice to prove the greatness of the artist who could express it with such terrible perfection: but when we compare it, by collation of the two scenes, with the deep simplicity of tenderness, the childlike accuracy of innocent emotion, in the passage previously cited, it seems to me that we must admit, as an unquestionable truth, that in the deepest and highest and purest qualities of tragic poetry Webster stands nearer to Shakespeare than any other English poet stands to Webster; and so much nearer as to be a good second; while it is at least questionable whether even Shelley can reasonably be accepted as a good third. Not one among the predecessors, contemporaries, or successors of Shakespeare and Webster has given proof of this double faculty—this coequal mastery of terror and pity, undiscoloured and undistorted, but vivified and glorified, by the splendour of immediate and infallible imagination. The most grovelling realism could scarcely be so impudent in stupidity as to pretend an aim at more perfect presentation of truth: the most fervent fancy, the most sensitive taste, could hardly dream of a desire for more exquisite expression of natural

passion in a form of utterance more naturally exalted and refined.

In all the vast and voluminous records of critical error there can be discovered no falsehood more foolish or more flagrant than the vulgar tradition which represents this high-souled and gentle-hearted poet as one morbidly fascinated by a fantastic attraction towards the 'violent delights' of horror and the nervous or sensational excitements of criminal detail; nor can there be conceived a more perverse or futile misapprehension than that which represents John Webster as one whose instinct led him by some obscure and oblique propensity to darken the darkness of southern crime or vice by an infusion of northern seriousness, of introspective cynicism and reflective intensity in wrongdoing, into the easy levity and infantile simplicity of spontaneous wickedness which distinguished the moral and social corruption of renascent Italy. Proof enough of this has already been adduced to make any protestation or appeal against such an estimate as preposterous in its superfluity as the misconception just mentioned is preposterous in its perversity. The great if not incomparable power displayed in Webster's delineation of such criminals as Flamineo and Bosola—Bonapartes in the bud, Napoleons in a nutshell, Cæsars who have missed their Rubicon

and collapse into the likeness of a Catiline—is a sign rather of his noble English loathing for the traditions associated with such names as Cæsar and Medici and Borgia, Catiline and Iscariot and Napoleon, than of any sympathetic interest in such incarnations of historic crime. Flamineo especially, the ardent pimp, the enthusiastic pandar, who prostitutes his sister and assassinates his brother with such earnest and single-hearted devotion to his own straightforward self-interest, has in him a sublime fervour of rascality which recalls rather the man of Brumaire and of Waterloo than the man of December and of Sedan. He has something too of Napoleon's ruffianly good-humour—the frankness of a thieves' kitchen or an imperial court, when the last thin figleaf of pretence has been plucked off and crumpled up and flung away. We can imagine him pinching his favourites by the ear and dictating memorials of mendacity with the self-possession of a self-made monarch. As it is, we see him only in the stage of parasite and pimp—more like the hired husband of a cast-off Creole than the resplendent rogue who fascinated even history for a time by the clamour and glitter of his triumphs. But the fellow is unmistakably an emperor in the egg—so dauntless and frontless in the very abjection of his villainy that we feel him to have been defrauded by

mischance of the only two destinations appropriate for the close of his career—a gibbet or a throne.

This imperial quality of ultimate perfection in egotism and crowning complacency in crime is wanting to his brother in atrocity, the most notable villain who figures on the stage of Webster's latest masterpiece. Bosola is not quite a possible Bonaparte; he is not even on a level with the bloody hirelings who execute the orders of tyranny and treason with the perfunctory atrocity of Anicetus or Saint-Arnaud. There is not, or I am much mistaken, a touch of imaginative poetry in the part of Flamineo: his passion, excitable on occasion and vehement enough, is as prosaic in its homely and cynical eloquence as the most fervent emotions of a Napoleon or an Iago when warmed or goaded into elocution. The one is a human snake, the other is a human wolf. Webster could not with equal propriety have put into the mouth of Flamineo such magnificent lyric poetry as seems to fall naturally, however suddenly and strangely, from the bitter and bloodthirsty tongue of Bosola. To him, as to the baffled and incoherent ruffian Romelio in the contemporary play of 'The Devil's Law-case,' his creator has assigned the utterance of such verse as can only be compared to that uttered by Cornelia over the body of her murdered son in the tragedy to which I have

just given so feeble and inadequate a word of tribute. In his command and in his use of the metre first made fashionable by the graceful improvisations of Greene, Webster seems to me as original and as peculiar as in his grasp and manipulation of character and event. All other poets, Shakespeare no less than Barnfield and Milton no less than Wither, have used this lyric instrument for none but gentle or gracious ends: Webster has breathed into it the power to express a sublimer and a profounder tone of emotion; he has given it the cadence and the colour of tragedy; he has touched and transfigured its note of meditative music into a chord of passionate austerity and prophetic awe. This was the key in which all previous poets had played upon the metre which Webster was to put to so deeply different an use.

> Walking in a valley greene,
> Spred with Flora summer queene:
> Where shee heaping all hir graces,
> Niggard seem'd in other places:
> Spring it was, and here did spring
> All that nature forth can bring.
>
> (*Tullies Loue*, p. 53, ed. 1589.)

> Nights were short, and daies were long;
> Blossoms on the Hauthorns hung:
> Philomele (Night-Musiques King)
> Tolde the comming of the spring.
>
> (*Grosart's Barnfield* [1876], p. 97.)

On a day (alack the day !)
Love, whose month is ever May,
Spied a blossom passing fair
Playing in the wanton air.

(*Love's Labour's Lost*, Act iv. Sc. iii.)

And now let us hear Webster.

Hearke, now every thing is still,
The Scritch-Owle, and the whistler shrill,
Call upon our Dame, aloud,
And bid her quickly don her shrowd :
Much you had of Land and rent,
Your length in clay 's now competent.
A long war disturb'd your minde,
Here your perfect peace is sign'd.
Of what is 't, fooles make such vaine keeping ?
Sin their conception, their birth, weeping :
Their life, a generall mist of error,
Their death, a hideous storme of terror.
Strew your haire with powders sweete :
Don cleane linnen, bath[e] your feete,
And (the foule feend more to checke)
A crucifixe let blesse your necke :
'Tis now full tide 'tweene night and day,
End your groane, and come away.

(*The Tragedy of the Dutchesse of Malfy* : 1623 : sig. K, K 2.)

The toll of the funereal rhythm, the heavy chime of the solemn and simple verse, the mournful menace and the brooding presage of its note, are but the covering, as it were, or the outer expression, of the tragic significance which deepens

and quickens and kindles to its close. Æschylus and Dante have never excelled, nor perhaps have Sophocles and Shakespeare ever equalled in impression of terrible effect, the fancy of bidding a live woman array herself in the raiment of the grave, and do for her own living body the offices done for a corpse by the ministers attendant on the dead.

The murderous humourist whose cynical inspiration gives life to these deadly lines is at first sight a less plausible, but on second thoughts may perhaps seem no less possible a character than Flamineo. Pure and simple ambition of the Napoleonic order is the motive which impels into infamy the aspiring parasite of Brachiano: a savage melancholy inflames the baffled greed of Bosola to a pitch of wickedness not unqualified by relenting touches of profitless remorse, which come always either too early or too late to bear any serviceable fruit of compassion or redemption. There is no deeper or more Shakespearean stroke of tragic humour in all Webster's writings than that conveyed in the scornful and acute reply—almost too acute perhaps for the character—of Bosola's remorseless patron to the remonstrance or appeal of his instrument against the insatiable excess and persistence of his cruelty: 'Thy pity is nothing akin to thee.' He has more in common

with Romelio in 'The Devil's Law-case,' an assassin who misses his aim and flounders into penitence much as that discomfortable drama misses its point and stumbles into vacuity: and whose unsatisfactory figure looks either like a crude and unsuccessful study for that of Bosola, or a disproportioned and emasculated copy from it. But to him too Webster has given the fitful force of fancy or inspiration which finds expression in such sudden snatches of funereal verse as this:

> How then can any monument say
> 'Here rest these bones till the last day,'
> When Time, swift both of foot and feather,
> May bear them the sexton kens not whither?
> What care I, then, though my last sleep
> Be in the desert or the deep,
> No lamp nor taper, day and night,
> To give my charnel chargeable light?
> I have there like quantity of ground,
> And at the last day I shall be found.

The villainous laxity of versification which deforms the grim and sardonic beauty of these occasionally rough and halting lines is perceptible here and there in 'The Duchess of Malfy,' but comes to its head in 'The Devil's Law-case.' It cannot, I fear, be denied that Webster was the first to relax those natural bonds of noble metre 'whose service is perfect freedom'—as Shakespeare found it, and combined with perfect loyalty

to its law the most perfect liberty of living and sublime and spontaneous and accurate expression. I can only conjecture that this greatest of the Shakespeareans was misguided out of his natural line of writing as exemplified and perfected in the tragedy of Vittoria, and lured into this cross and crooked byway of immetrical experiment, by the temptation of some theory or crotchet on the score of what is now called naturalism or realism ; which, if there were any real or natural weight in the reasoning that seeks to support it, would of course do away, and of course ought to do away, with dramatic poetry altogether : for if it is certain that real persons do not actually converse in good metre, it is happily no less certain that they do not actually converse in bad metre. In the hands of so great a tragic poet as Webster a peculiar and impressive effect may now and then be produced by this anomalous and illegitimate way of writing ; it certainly suits well with the thoughtful and fantastic truculence of Bosola's reflections on death and dissolution and decay—his 'talk fit for a charnel,' which halts and hovers between things hideous and things sublime. But it is a step on the downward way that leads to the negation or the confusion of all distinctions between poetry and prose ; a result to which it would be grievous to think that the example of Shakespeare's greatest

contemporary should in any way appear to conduce.

The doctrine or the motive of chance (whichever we may prefer to call it) is seen in its fullest workings and felt in its furthest bearings by the student of Webster's masterpiece. The fifth act of 'The Duchess of Malfy' has been assailed on the very ground which it should have been evident to a thoughtful and capable reader that the writer must have intended to take up—on the ground that the whole upshot of the story is dominated by sheer chance, arranged by mere error, and guided by pure accident. No formal scheme or religious principle of retribution would have been so strangely or so thoroughly in keeping with the whole scheme and principle of the tragedy. After the overwhelming terrors and the overpowering beauties of that unique and marvellous fourth act, in which the genius of this poet spreads its fullest and its darkest wing for the longest and the strongest of its flights, it could not but be that the subsequent action and passion of the drama should appear by comparison unimpressive or ineffectual; but all the effect or impression possible of attainment under the inevitable burden of this difficulty is achieved by natural and simple and straightforward means. If Webster has not made the part of Antonio dramatically striking and

attractive—as he probably found it impossible to do—he has at least bestowed on the fugitive and unconscious widower of his murdered heroine a pensive and manly grace of deliberate resignation which is not without pathetic as well as poetical effect. In the beautiful and well-known scene where the echo from his wife's unknown and new-made grave seems to respond to his meditative mockery and forewarn him of his impending death, Webster has given such reality and seriousness to an old commonplace of contemporary fancy or previous fashion in poetry that we are fain to forget the fantastic side of the conception and see only the tragic aspect of its meaning. A weightier objection than any which can be brought against the conduct of the play might be suggested to the minds of some readers—and these, perhaps, not too exacting or too captious readers—by the sudden vehemence of transformation which in the great preceding act seems to fall like fire from heaven upon the two chief criminals who figure on the stage of murder. It seems rather a miraculous retribution, a judicial violation of the laws of nature, than a reasonably credible consequence or evolution of those laws, which strikes Ferdinand with madness and Bosola with repentance. But the whole atmosphere of the action is so charged with thunder that this double and simultaneous

shock of moral electricity rather thrills us with admiration and faith than chills us with repulsion or distrust. The passionate intensity and moral ardour of imagination which we feel to vibrate and penetrate through every turn and every phrase of the dialogue would suffice to enforce upon our belief a more nearly incredible revolution of nature or revulsion of the soul.

It is so difficult for even the very greatest poets to give any vivid force of living interest to a figure of passive endurance that perhaps the only instance of perfect triumph over this difficulty is to be found in the character of Desdemona. Shakespeare alone could have made her as interesting as Imogen or Cordelia; though these have so much to do and dare, and she after her first appearance has simply to suffer: even Webster could not give such individual vigour of characteristic life to the figure of his martyr as to the figure of his criminal heroine. Her courage and sweetness, her delicacy and sincerity, her patience and her passion, are painted with equal power and tenderness of touch: yet she hardly stands before us as distinct from others of her half angelic sisterhood as does the White Devil from the fellowship of her comrades in perdition. But if, as we may assuredly assume, it was on the twenty-third 'nouell' of William Painter's 'Palace of Pleasure' that Webster's

crowning masterpiece was founded, the poet's moral and spiritual power of transfiguration is here even more admirable than in the previous case of his other and wellnigh coequally consummate poem. The narrative degrades and brutalises the widowed heroine's affection for her second husband to the actual level of the vile conception which the poet attributes and confines to the foul imagination of her envious and murderous brothers. Here again, and finally and supremely here, the purifying and exalting power of Webster's noble and magnanimous imagination is gloriously unmistakable by all and any who have eyes to read and hearts to recognise.

For it is only with Shakespeare that Webster can ever be compared in any way to his disadvantage as a tragic poet: above all others of his country he stands indisputably supreme. The place of Marlowe indeed is higher among our poets by right of his primacy as a founder and a pioneer: but of course his work has not—as of course it could not have—that plenitude and perfection of dramatic power in construction and dramatic subtlety in detail which the tragedies of Webster share in so large a measure with the tragedies of Shakespeare. Marston, the poet with whom he has most in common, might almost be said to stand in the same relation to Webster as

Webster to Shakespeare. In single lines and phrases, in a few detached passages and a very few distinguishable scenes, he is worthy to be compared with the greater poet; he suddenly rises and dilates to the stature and the strength of a model whom usually he can but follow afar off. Marston, as a tragic poet, is not quite what Webster would be if his fame depended simply on such scenes as those in which the noble mother of Vittoria breaks off her daughter's first interview with Brachiano—spares, and commends to God's forgiveness, the son who has murdered his brother before her eyes—and lastly appears 'in several forms of distraction,' 'grown a very old woman in two hours,' and singing that most pathetic and imaginative of all funereal invocations which the finest critic of all time so justly and so delicately compared to the watery dirge of Ariel. There is less refinement, less exaltation and perfection of feeling, less tenderness of emotion and less nobility of passion, but hardly less force and fervour, less weighty and sonorous ardour of expression, in the very best and loftiest passages of Marston: but his genius is more uncertain, more fitful and intermittent, less harmonious, coherent, and trustworthy than Webster's. And Webster, notwithstanding an occasional outbreak into Aristophanic license of momentary sarcasm

through the sardonic lips of such a cynical ruffian as Ferdinand or Flamineo, is without exception the cleanliest, as Marston is beyond comparison the coarsest writer of his time. In this as in other matters of possible comparison that 'vessel of deathless wrath,' the implacable and inconsolable poet of sympathy half maddened into rage and aspiration goaded backwards to despair—it should be needless to add the name of Cyril Tourneur—stands midway between these two more conspicuous figures of their age. But neither the father and master of poetic pessimists, the splendid and sombre creator of Vindice and his victims, nor any other third whom our admiration may discern among all the greatest of their fellows, can be compared with Webster on terms more nearly equal than those on which Webster stands in relation to the sovereign of them all.

THOMAS DEKKER

Of all English poets, if not of all poets on record, Dekker is perhaps the most difficult to classify. The grace and delicacy, the sweetness and spontaneity of his genius are not more obvious and undeniable than the many defects which impair and the crowning deficiency which degrades it. As long, but so long only, as a man retains some due degree of self-respect and respect for the art he serves or the business he follows, it matters less for his fame in the future than for his prosperity in the present whether he retains or discards any vestige of respect for any other obligation in the world. François Villon, compared with whom all other reckless and disreputable men of genius seem patterns of austere decency and elevated regularity of life, was as conscientious and self-respectful an artist as a Virgil or a Tennyson: he is not a great poet only, but one of the most blameless, the most perfect, the most faultless among his fellows in the first class of writers for all time. If not in that class, yet high in the class immediately

beneath it, the world would long since have agreed to enrol the name of Thomas Dekker, had he not wanted that one gift which next to genius is the most indispensable for all aspirants to a station among the masters of creative literature. For he was by nature at once a singer and a maker: he had the gift of native music and the birthright of inborn invention. His song was often sweet as honey; his fancy sometimes as rich and subtle, his imagination as delicate and strong, as that of the very greatest among dramatists or poets. For gentle grace of inspiration and vivid force of realism he is eclipsed at his very best by Shakespeare's self alone. No such combination or alternation of such admirable powers is discernible in any of his otherwise more splendid or sublime compeers. And in one gift, the divine gift of tenderness, he comes nearer to Shakespeare and stands higher above others than in any other quality of kindred genius.

And with all these gifts, if the vulgar verdict of his own day and of later days be not less valid than vulgar, he was a failure. There is a pathetic undertone of patience and resignation not unqualified by manly though submissive regret, which recurs now and then, or seems to recur, in the personal accent of his subdued and dignified appeal to the casual reader, suggestive of a sense

that the higher triumphs of art, the brighter prosperities of achievement, were not reserved for him; and yet not unsuggestive of a consciousness that, if this be so, it is not so through want of the primal and essential qualities of a poet. For, as Lamb says, Dekker 'had poetry enough for anything'; at all events, for anything which can be accomplished by a poet endowed in the highest degree with the gifts of graceful and melodious fancy, tender and cordial humour, vivid and pathetic realism, a spontaneous refinement and an exquisite simplicity of expression. With the one great gift of seriousness, of noble ambition, of self-confidence rooted in self-respect, he must have won an indisputable instead of a questionable place among the immortal writers of his age. But this gift had been so absolutely withheld from him by nature or withdrawn from him by circumstance that he has left us not one single work altogether worthy of the powers now revealed and now eclipsed, now suddenly radiant and now utterly extinct, in the various and voluminous array of his writings. Although his earlier plays are in every way superior to his later, there is evidence even in the best of them of the author's infirmity of hand. From the first he shows himself idly or perversely or impotently prone to loosen his hold on character and story alike before his plot can be duly carried

out or his conceptions adequately developed. His 'pleasant Comedie of The Gentle Craft,' first printed three years before the death of Queen Elizabeth, is one of his brightest and most coherent pieces of work, graceful and lively throughout, if rather thin-spun and slight of structure: but the more serious and romantic part of the action is more lightly handled than the broad light comedy of the mad and merry Lord Mayor Simon Eyre, a figure in the main original and humorous enough, but somewhat over persistent in ostentation and repetition of jocose catchwords after the fashion of mine host of the Garter; a type which Shakespeare knew better than to repeat, but of which his inferiors seem to have been enamoured beyond all reason. In this fresh and pleasant little play there are few or no signs of the author's higher poetic abilities: the style is pure and sweet, simple and spontaneous, without any hint of a quality not required by the subject: but in the other play of Dekker's which bears the same date as this one his finest and rarest gifts of imagination and emotion, feeling and fancy, colour and melody, are as apparent as his ingrained faults of levity and laziness. The famous passage in which Webster couples together the names of 'Mr. Shakespeare, Mr. Dekker, and Mr. Heywood,' seems explicable when we compare the style of 'Old Fortunatus'

with the style of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' Dekker had as much of the peculiar sweetness, the gentle fancy, the simple melody of Shakespeare in his woodland dress, as Heywood of the homely and noble realism, the heartiness and humour, the sturdy sympathy and joyful pride of Shakespeare in his most English mood of patriotic and historic loyalty. Not that these qualities are wanting in the work of Dekker: he was an ardent and a combative patriot, ever ready to take up the cudgels in prose or rhyme for England and her yeomen against Popery and the world: but it is rather the man than the poet who speaks on these occasions: his singing faculty does not apply itself so naturally to such work as to the wild wood-notes of passion and fancy and pathos which in his happiest moments, even when they remind us of Shakespeare's, provoke no sense of unworthiness or inequality in comparison with these. It is not with the most popular and famous names of his age that the sovereign name of Shakespeare is most properly or most profitably to be compared. His genius has really far less in common with that of Jonson or of Fletcher than with that of Webster or of Dekker. To the last-named poet even Lamb was for once less than just when he said of the 'frantic Lover' in 'Old Fortunatus' that 'he talks pure Biron and Romeo; he is almost as poetical

as they.' The word 'almost' should be supplanted by the word 'fully'; and the criticism would then be no less adequate than apt. Sidney himself might have applauded the verses which clothe with living music a passion as fervent and as fiery a fancy as his own. Not even in the rapturous melodies of that matchless series of songs and sonnets which glorify the inseparable names of Astrophel and Stella will the fascinated student find a passage more enchanting than this.

Thou art a traitor to that white and red
Which sitting on her cheeks (being Cupid's throne)
Is my heart's sovereign: O, when she is dead,
This wonder, Beauty, shall be found in none.
Now Agripyne's not mine, I vow to be
In love with nothing but deformity.
O fair Deformity, I muse all eyes
Are not enamoured of thee: thou didst never
Murder men's hearts, or let them pine like wax,
Melting against the sun of thy disdain;[1]
Thou art a faithful nurse to Chastity;
Thy beauty is not like to Agripyne's,
For cares, and age, and sickness, hers deface,
But thine 's eternal: O Deformity,
Thy fairness is not like to Agripyne's,
For, dead, her beauty will no beauty have,
But thy face looks most lovely in the grave.

[1] As even Lamb allowed the meaningless and immetrical word 'destiny' to stand at the end of this line in place of the obviously right reading, it is not wonderful that all later editors of this passage should hitherto have done so.

Shakespeare has nothing more exquisite in expression of passionate fancy, more earnest in emotion, more spontaneous in simplicity, more perfect in romantic inspiration. But the poet's besetting sin of laxity, his want of seriousness and steadiness, his idle, shambling, shifty way of writing, had power even then, in the very prime of his promise, to impede his progress and impair his chance of winning the race which he had set himself—and yet which he had hardly set himself—to run. And if these things were done in the green tree, it was only too obvious what would be done in the dry; it must have been clear that this golden-tongued and gentle-hearted poet had not strength of spirit or fervour of ambition enough to put conscience into his work and resolution into his fancies. But even from such headlong recklessness as he had already displayed no reader could have anticipated so singular a defiance of all form and order, all coherence and proportion, as is exhibited in his 'Satiromastix.' The controversial part of the play is so utterly alien from the romantic part that it is impossible to regard them as component factors of the same original plot. It seems to me unquestionable that Dekker must have conceived the design, and probable that he must have begun the composition, of a serious play on the subject of William Rufus and Sir

Walter Tyrrel, before the appearance of Ben Jonson's 'Poetaster' impelled or instigated him to some immediate attempt at rejoinder; and that being in a feverish hurry to retort the blow inflicted on him by a heavier hand than his own he devised —perhaps between jest and earnest—the preposterously incoherent plan of piecing out his farcical and satirical design by patching and stitching it into his unfinished scheme of tragedy. It may be assumed, and it is much to be hoped, that there never existed another poet capable of imagining—much less of perpetrating—an incongruity so monstrous and so perverse. The explanation so happily suggested by a modern critic that William Rufus is meant for Shakespeare, and that 'Lyly is Sir Vaughan ap Rees,' wants only a little further development, on the principle of analogy, to commend itself to every scholar. It is equally obvious that the low-bred and foul-mouthed ruffian Captain Tucca must be meant for Sir Philip Sidney; the vulgar idiot Asinius Bubo for Lord Bacon; the half-witted underling Peter Flash for Sir Walter Raleigh; and the immaculate Celestina, who escapes by stratagem and force of virtue from the villainous designs of Shakespeare, for the lady long since indicated by the perspicacity of a Chalmers as the object of that lawless and desperate passion which found utterance in the sonnets of

her unprincipled admirer—Queen Elizabeth. As a previous suggestion of my own, to the effect that George Peele was probably the real author of 'Romeo and Juliet,' has had the singular good fortune to be not merely adopted but appropriated —in serious earnest—by a contemporary student, without—as far as I am aware—a syllable of acknowledgment, I cannot but anticipate a similar acceptance in similar quarters for the modest effort at interpretation now submitted to the judgment of the ingenuous reader.

Gifford is not too severe on the palpable incongruities of Dekker's preposterous medley: but his impeachment of Dekker as a more virulent and intemperate controversialist than Jonson is not less preposterous than the structure of this play. The nobly gentle and manly verses in which the less fortunate and distinguished poet disclaims and refutes the imputation of envy or malevolence excited by the favour enjoyed by his rival in high quarters should have sufficed, in common justice, to protect him from such a charge. There is not a word in Jonson's satire expressive of anything but savage and unqualified scorn for his humbler antagonist: and the tribute paid by that antagonist to his genius, the appeal to his better nature which concludes the torrent of recrimination, would have won some word of honourable recognition from

any but the most unscrupulous and ungenerous of partisans. That Dekker was unable to hold his own against Jonson when it came to sheer hard hitting—that on the ground or platform of personal satire he was as a light weight pitted against a heavy weight—is of course too plain, from the very first round, to require any further demonstration. But it is not less plain that in delicacy and simplicity and sweetness of inspiration the poet who could write the scene in which the bride takes poison (as she believes) from the hand of her father, in presence of her bridegroom, as a refuge from the passion of the king, was as far above Jonson as Jonson was above him in the robuster qualities of intellect or genius. This most lovely scene, for pathos tempered with fancy and for passion distilled in melody, is comparable only with higher work, of rarer composition and poetry more pure, than Jonson's: it is a very treasure-house of verses like jewels, bright as tears and sweet as flowers. When Dekker writes like this, then truly we seem to see his right hand in the left hand of Shakespeare.

To find the names of Ben Jonson and Thomas Dekker amicably associated in the composition of a joint poem or pageant within the space of a year from the publication of so violent a retort by the latter to so vehement an attack by the former

must amuse if it does not astonish the reader least capable of surprise at the boyish readiness to quarrel and the boyish readiness to shake hands which would seem to be implied in so startling a change of relations. In all the huge, costly, wearisome, barbaric and pedantic ceremonial which welcomed into London the Solomon of Scotland, the exhausted student who attempts to follow the ponderous elaboration of report drawn up by these reconciled enemies will remark the solid and sedate merit of Jonson's best couplets with less pleasure than he will receive from the quaint sweetness of Dekker's lyric notes. Admirable as are many of Ben Jonson's songs for their finish of style and fullness of matter, it is impossible for those who know what is or should be the special aim or the distinctive quality of lyric verse to place him in the first class—much less, in the front rank—of lyric poets. He is at his best a good way ahead of such song-writers as Byron; but Dekker at his best belongs to the order of such song-writers as Blake or Shelley. Perhaps the very finest example of his flawless and delicate simplicity of excellence in this field of work may be the well-known song in honour of honest poverty and in praise of honest labour which so gracefully introduces the heroine of a play published in this same year of the accession of James—

'Patient Grissel'; a romantic tragicomedy so attractive for its sweetness and lightness of tone and touch that no reader will question the judgment or condemn the daring of the poets who ventured upon ground where Chaucer had gone before them with such gentle stateliness of step and such winning tenderness of gesture. His deepest note of pathos they have not even attempted to reproduce: but in freshness and straightforwardness, in frankness and simplicity of treatment, the dramatic version is not generally unworthy to be compared with the narrative which it follows afar off.[1] Chettle and Haughton, the associates of Dekker in this enterprise, had each of them something of their colleague's finer qualities; but the best scenes in the play remind me rather of Dekker's best early work than of 'Robert Earl of Huntington' or of 'Englishmen for my Money.' So much has been said of the evil influence of Italian example upon English character in the age of Elizabeth, and so much has been made of such confessions or im-

[1] I may here suggest a slight emendation in the text of the spirited and graceful scene with which this play opens. The original reads:

> So fares it with coy dames, who, great with scorn,
> Shew the care-pinèd hearts that sue to them.

The word *Shew* is an obvious misprint—but more probably, I venture to think, for the word *Shun* than for the word *Fly*, which is substituted by Mr. Collier and accepted by Dr. Grosart.

putations as distinguish the clamorous and malevolent penitence of Robert Greene, that it is more than agreeable to find at least one dramatic poet of the time who has the manliness to enter a frank and contemptuous protest against this habit of malignant self-excuse. 'Italy,' says an honest gentleman in this comedy to a lying and impudent gull, 'Italy infects you not, but your own diseased spirits. Italy? Out, you froth, you scum! because your soul is mud, and that you have breathed in Italy, you'll say Italy has defiled you: away, you boar: thou wilt wallow in mire in the sweetest country in the world.'

There are many traces of moral or spiritual weakness and infirmity in the writings of Dekker and the scattered records or indications of his unprosperous though not unlaborious career: but there are manifest and manifold signs of an honest and earnest regard for justice and fair dealing, as well as of an inexhaustible compassion for suffering, an indestructible persistency of pity, which found characteristic expression in the most celebrated of his plays. There is a great gulf between it and the first of Victor Hugo's tragedies: yet the instinct of either poet is the same, as surely as their common motive is the redemption of a fallen woman by the influence of twinborn love and shame. Of all Dekker's works, 'The Honest

Whore' comes nearest to some reasonable degree of unity and harmony in conception and construction; his besetting vice of reckless and sluttish incoherence has here done less than usual to deform the proportions and deface the impression of his design. Indeed, the connection of the two serious plots in the first part is a rare example of dexterous and happy simplicity in composition: the comic underplot of the patient man and shrewish wife is more loosely attached by a slighter thread of relation to these two main stories, but is so amusing in its light and facile play of inventive merriment and harmless mischief as to need no further excuse. Such an excuse, however, might otherwise be found in the plea that it gives occasion for the most beautiful, the most serious, and the most famous passage in all the writings of its author. The first scene of this first part has always appeared to me one of the most effective and impressive on our stage: the interruption of the mock funeral by the one true mourner whose passion it was intended to deceive into despair is so striking as a mere incident or theatrical device that the noble and simple style in which the graver part of the dialogue is written can be no more than worthy of the subject: whereas in other plays of Dekker's the style is too often beneath the merit of the subject, and the subject as often below the value of the style. The

subsequent revival of Infelice from her trance is represented with such vivid and delicate power that the scene, short and simple as it is, is one of the most fascinating in any play of the period. In none of these higher and finer parts of the poem can I trace the touch of any other hand than the principal author's: but the shopkeeping scenes of the underplot have at least as much of Middleton's usual quality as of Dekker's; homely and rough-cast as they are, there is a certain finish or thoroughness about them which is more like the careful realism of the former than the slovenly naturalism of the latter. The coarse commonplaces of the sermon on prostitution by which Bellafront is so readily and surprisingly reclaimed into respectability give sufficient and superfluous proof that Dekker had nothing of the severe and fiery inspiration which makes a great satirist or a great preacher; but when we pass again into a sweeter air than that of the boudoir or the pulpit, it is the unmistakable note of Dekker's most fervent and tender mood of melody which enchants us in such verses as these, spoken by a lover musing on the portrait of a mistress whose coffin has been borne before him to the semblance of a grave.

> Of all the roses grafted on her cheeks,
> Of all the graces dancing in her eyes,
> Of all the music set upon her tongue,

> Of all that was past woman's excellence
> In her white bosom, look, a painted board
> Circumscribes all !

Is there any other literature, we are tempted to ask ourselves, in which the writer of these lines, and of many as sweet and perfect in their inspired simplicity as these, would be rated no higher among his countrymen than Thomas Dekker ?

From the indisputable fact of Middleton's partnership in this play Mr. Dyce was induced to assume the very questionable inference of his partnership in the sequel which was licensed for acting five years later. To me this second part seems so thoroughly of one piece and one pattern, so apparently the result of one man's invention and composition, that without more positive evidence I should hesitate to assign a share in it to any colleague of the poet under whose name it first appeared. There are far fewer scenes or passages in this than in the preceding play which suggest or present themselves for quotation or selection: the tender and splendid and pensive touches of pathetic or imaginative poetry which we find in the first part, we shall be disappointed if we seek in the second: its incomparable claim on our attention is the fact that it contains the single character in all the voluminous and miscellaneous works of Dekker which gives its creator

an indisputable right to a place of perpetual honour among the imaginative humourists of England, and therefore among the memorable artists and creative workmen of the world. Apart from their claim to remembrance as poets and dramatists of more or less artistic and executive capacity, Dekker and Middleton are each of them worthy to be remembered as the inventor or discoverer of a wholly original, interesting, and natural type of character, as essentially inimitable as it is undeniably unimitated: the savage humour and cynic passion of De Flores, the genial passion and tender humour of Orlando Friscobaldo, are equally life-like in the truthfulness and completeness of their distinct and vivid presentation. The merit of the play in which the character last named is a leading figure consists, mainly or almost wholly in the presentation of the three principal persons: the reclaimed harlot, now the faithful and patient wife of her first seducer; the broken-down, ruffianly, light-hearted and light-headed libertine who has married her; and the devoted old father who watches in the disguise of a servant over the changes of her fortune, the sufferings, risks, and temptations which try the purity of her penitence and confirm the fortitude of her constancy. Of these three characters I cannot but think that any dramatist who ever lived might have felt that he

had reason to be proud. It is strange that Charles Lamb, to whom of all critics and all men the pathetic and humorous charm of the old man's personality might most confidently have been expected most cordially to appeal, should have left to Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt the honour of doing justice to so beautiful a creation—the crowning evidence to the greatness of Dekker's gifts, his power of moral imagination and his delicacy of dramatic execution. From the first to the last word of his part the quaint sweet humour of the character is sustained with an instinctive skill which would do honour to a far more careful and a far more famous artist than Dekker. The words with which he receives the false news of his fallen daughter's death; 'Dead? my last and best peace go with her!'—those which he murmurs to himself on seeing her again after seventeen years of estrangement; 'The mother's own face, I ha' not forgot that'—prepare the way for the admirable final scene in which his mask of anger drops off, and his ostentation of obduracy relaxes into tenderness and tears. 'Dost thou beg for him, thou precious man's meat, thou? has he not beaten thee, kicked thee, trod on thee? and dost thou fawn on him like his spaniel? has he not pawned thee to thy petticoat, sold thee to thy smock, made ye leap at a crust? yet wouldst have me

save him?—What, dost thou hold him? let go his hand: if thou dost not forsake him, a father's everlasting blessing fall upon both your heads!' The fusion of humour with pathos into perfection of exquisite accuracy in expression which must be recognised at once and remembered for ever by any competent reader of this scene is the highest quality of Dekker as a writer of prose, and is here displayed at its highest: the more poetic or romantic quality of his genius had already begun to fade out when this second part of his finest poem was written. Hazlitt has praised the originality, dexterity, and vivacity of the effect produced by the stratagem which Infelice employs for the humiliation of her husband, when by accusing herself of imaginary infidelity under the most incredibly degrading conditions she entraps him into gratuitous fury and turns the tables on him by the production of evidence against himself; and the scene is no doubt theatrically effective: but the grace and delicacy of the character are sacrificed to this comparatively unworthy consideration: the pure, high-minded, noble-hearted lady, whose loyal and passionate affection was so simply and so attractively displayed in the first part of her story, is so lamentably humiliated by the cunning and daring immodesty of such a device that we hardly feel it so revolting an incongruity

as it should have been to see this princess enjoying, in common with her father and her husband, the spectacle of imprisoned harlots on penitential parade in the Bridewell of Milan; a thoroughly Hogarthian scene in the grim and vivid realism of its tragicomic humour.

But if the poetic and realistic merits of these two plays make us understand why Webster should have coupled its author with the author of 'Twelfth Night' and 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' the demerits of the two plays next published under his single name are so grave, so gross, so manifold, that the writer seems unworthy to be coupled as a dramatist with a journeyman poet so far superior to him in honest thoroughness and smoothness of workmanship as, even at his very hastiest and crudest, was Thomas Heywood. In style and versification the patriotic and anti-Catholic drama which bears the Protestant and apocalyptic title of 'The Whore of Babylon' is still, upon the whole, very tolerably spirited and fluent, with gleams of fugitive poetry and glimpses of animated action; but the construction is ponderous and puerile, the declamation vacuous and vehement. An Æschylus alone could have given us, in a tragedy on the subject of the Salamis of England, a fit companion to the 'Persæ'; which, as Shakespeare let the chance pass by him, remains alone for ever in the

incomparable glory of its triumphant and sublime perfection. Marlowe perhaps might have made something of it, though the task would have taxed his energies to the utmost, and overtasked the utmost of his skill; Dekker could make nothing. The empress of Babylon is but a poor slipshod ragged prostitute in the hands of this poetic beadle: 'non ragioniam di lei, ma guarda e passa.'

Of the three plays in which Dekker took part with Webster, the two plays in which he took part with Ford, and the second play in which he took part with Middleton, I have spoken respectively in my several essays on those other three poets. The next play which bears his name alone was published five years later than the political or historical sketch or study which we have just dismissed; and which, compared with it, is a tolerable if not a creditable piece of work. It is difficult to abstain from intemperate language in speaking of such a dramatic abortion as that which bears the grotesque and puerile inscription, 'If this be not a good Play, the Devil is in it.' A worse has seldom discredited the name of any man with a spark of genius in him. Dryden's delectable tragedy of 'Amboyna,' Lee's remarkable tragicomedy of 'Gloriana,' Pope's elegant comedy of 'Three Hours after Marriage,' are scarcely more unworthy of their authors, more futile or more flaccid or more

audacious in their headlong and unabashed incompetence. Charity would suggest that it must have been written against time in a debtor's prison, under the influence of such liquor as Catherina Bountinall or Doll Tearsheet would have flung at the tapster's head with an accompaniment of such language as those eloquent and high-spirited ladies, under less offensive provocation, were wont to lavish on the officials of an oppressive law. I have read a good deal of bad verse, but anything like the metre of this play I have never come across in all the range of that excruciating experience. The rare and faint indications that the writer was or had been an humourist and a poet serve only to bring into fuller relief the reckless and shameless incompetence of the general workmanship.[1]

[1] As I have given elsewhere a sample of Dekker at his best, I give here a sample taken at random from the opening of this unhappy play.

Hie thee to Naples, Rufman; thou shalt find
A prince there newly crowned, aptly inclined
To any bendings: lest his youthful brows
Reach at stars only, weigh down his loftiest boughs
With leaden plummets, poison his best thoughts with taste
Of things most sensual: if the heart once waste,
The body feels consumption: good or bad kings
Breed subjects like them: clear streams flow from clear springs.
Turn therefore Naples to a puddle: with a civil
Much promising face, and well oiled, play the court devil.

The vigorous melody of these 'masculine numbers' is not more remarkable for its virile force and honied fluency than is the

This supernatural and 'superlunatical' attempt at serious farce or farcical morality marks the nadir of Dekker's ability as a dramatist. The diabolic part of the tragicomic business is distinctly inferior to the parallel or similar scenes in the much older play of 'Grim the Collier of Croydon,' which is perhaps more likely to have been the writer's immediate model than the original story by Machiavelli. The two remaining plays now extant which bear the single name of Dekker give no sign of his highest powers, but are tolerable examples of journeyman's work in the field of romantic or fanciful comedy. 'Match me in London' is the better play of the two, very fairly constructed after its simple fashion, and reasonably well written in a smooth and unambitious style: 'The Wonder of a Kingdom' is a light, slight, rough piece of work, in its contrasts of character as crude and boyish as any of the old moralities, and in its action as mere a dance of puppets: but it shows at least that Dekker had

lighter dialogue of the play for such brilliant wit or lambent humour as flashes out in pleasantries like this.

King. What are you, and whence come you?
Rufman. From Helvetia.
Spendola. What hell says he?
Jovineili. Peace; you shall know hot hell [*sic*] time enough.

'I hope here be proofs' that my strictures on the worst work of a poet whose best work I treasure so heartily, and whose best qualities I rate so highly, are rather too sparing than too severe.

regained the faculty of writing decent verse on occasion. The fine passage quoted by Scott in 'The Antiquary,' and taken by his editors to be a forgery of his own, will be familiar to many myriads of readers who are never likely to look it up in the original context. Of two masques called 'Britannia's Honour' and 'London's Tempe' it must suffice to say that the former contains a notable specimen of cockney or canine French which may serve to relieve the conscientious reader's weariness, and the latter a comic song of blacksmiths at work which may pass muster at a pinch as a tolerably quaint and lively piece of rough and ready fancy. But Jonson for the court and Middleton for the city were far better craftsmen in this line than ever was Dekker at his best.

Two plays remain for notice in which the part taken by Dekker would be, I venture to think, unmistakable, even if no external evidence were extant of his partnership in either. As it is, we know that in the winter which saw the close of the sixteenth century he was engaged with the author of 'The Parliament of Bees' and the author of 'Englishmen for my Money' in the production of a play called 'The Spanish Moor's Tragedy.' More than half a century afterwards, a tragedy in which a Spanish Moor is the principal

and indeed the only considerable agent was published, and attributed—of all poets in the world—to Christopher Marlowe, by a knavish and ignorant bookseller of the period. That 'Lust's Dominion, or the Lascivious Queen,' was partly founded on a pamphlet published after Marlowe's death was not a consideration sufficient to offer any impediment to this imposture. That the hand which in the year of this play's appearance on the stage gave 'Old Fortunatus' to the world of readers was the hand to which we owe the finer scenes or passages of 'Lust's Dominion,' the whole of the opening scene bears such apparent witness as requires no evidence to support and would require very conclusive evidence to confute it. The sweet spontaneous luxury of the lines in which the queen strives to seduce her paramour out of sullenness has the very ring of Dekker's melody: the rough and reckless rattle of the abrupt rhymes intended to express a sudden vehemence of change and energy; the constant repetition or reiteration of interjections and ejaculations which are evidently supposed to give an air of passionate realism and tragic nature to the jingling and jerky dialogue; many little mannerisms too trivial to specify and too obvious to mistake; the occasional spirit and beauty, the frequent crudity and harshness, of the impetuous and uncertain style; the faults no less

than the merits, the merits as plainly as the faults, attest the presence of his fitful and wilful genius with all the defects of its qualities and all the weakness of its strength. The chaotic extravagance of collapse which serves by way of catastrophe to bring the action headlong to a close is not more puerile in the violence of its debility than the conclusions of other plays by Dekker; conclusions which might plausibly appear, to a malcontent or rather to a lenient reader, the improvisations of inebriety. There is but one character which stands out in anything of lifelike relief; for the queen and her paramour are but the usual diabolic puppets of the contemporary tragic stage: but there is something of life-blood in the part of the honest and hot-headed young prince. This too is very like Dekker, whose idle and impatient energy could seldom if ever sustain a diffused or divided interest, but except when working hopelessly and heartlessly against time was likely to fix on some special point, and give life at least to some single figure.

There is nothing incongruous in his appearance as a playwright in partnership with Middleton or with Chettle, with Haughton or with Day; but a stranger association than that of Massinger's name with Dekker's it would not be easy to conceive. Could either poet have lent the other something

of his own best quality; could Massinger have caught from Dekker the freshness and spontaneity of his poetic inspiration, and Dekker have learnt of Massinger the conscientious excellence and studious self-respect of his dramatic workmanship; the result must have been one of the noblest and completest masterpieces of the English stage. As it is, the famous and beautiful play which we owe to the alliance of their powers is a proverbial example of incongruous contrasts and combinations. The opening and the closing scenes were very properly and very fortunately consigned to the charge of the younger and sedater poet: so that, whatever discrepancy may disturb the intervening acts, the grave and sober harmonies of a temperate and serious artist begin and end the concert in perfect correspondence of consummate execution. 'The first act of "The Virgin Martyr,"' said Coleridge, 'is as fine an act as I remember in any play.' And certainly it would be impossible to find one in which the business of the scene is more skilfully and smoothly opened, with more happiness of arrangement, more dignity and dexterity of touch. But most lovers of poetry would give it all, and a dozen such triumphs of scenical and rhetorical composition, for the brief dialogue in the second act between the heroine and her attendant angel. Its simplicity is so childlike, its

inspiration so pure in instinct and its expression so perfect in taste, its utterance and its abstinence, its effusion and its reserve, are so far beyond praise or question or any comment but thanksgiving, that these forty-two lines, homely and humble in manner as they are if compared with the refined rhetoric and the scrupulous culture of Massinger, would suffice to keep the name of Dekker sweet and safe for ever among the most memorable if not among the most pre-eminent of his kindred and his age. The four scenes of rough and rank buffoonery which deface this act and the two following have given very reasonable offence to critics from whom they have provoked very unreasonable reflections. That they represent the coarser side of the genius whose finer aspect is shown in the sweetest passages of the poem has never been disputed by any one capable of learning the rudiments or the accidence of literary criticism. An admirable novelist and poet who had the misfortune to mistake himself for a theologian and a critic was unlucky enough to assert that he knew not on what ground these brutal buffooneries had been assigned to their unmistakable author ; in other words, to acknowledge his ignorance of the first elements of the subject on which it pleased him to write in a tone of critical and spiritual authority. Not even when his unwary and unscrupulous audacity of self-

confidence impelled Charles Kingsley to challenge John Henry Newman to the duel of which the upshot left him gasping so piteously on the ground selected for their tournament—not even then did the author of 'Hypatia' display such a daring and immedicable capacity of misrepresentation based on misconception as when this most ingenuously disingenuous of all controversialists avowed himself 'aware of no canons of internal criticism which would enable us to decide as boldly as Mr. Gifford does that all the indecency is Dekker's and all the poetry Massinger's.' Now the words of Gifford's note on the dialogue of which I have already spoken, between the saint and the angel, are these. 'What follows is exquisitely beautiful. . . . I am persuaded that this also was written by Dekker.' And seeing that no mortal critic but Kingsley ever dreamed of such absurdity as Kingsley rushes forward to refute, his controversial capacity will probably be regarded by all serious students of poetry or criticism as measurable by the level of his capacity for accurate report of fact or accurate citation of evidence.

There are times when we are tempted to denounce the Muse of Dekker as the most shiftless and shameless of slovens or of sluts; but when we consider the quantity of work which she managed to struggle or shuffle through with such occasionally

admirable and memorable results, we are once more inclined to reclaim for her a place of honour among her more generally respectable or reputable sisters. I am loth to believe what I see no reason to suppose, that she was responsible for the dismal drivel of a poem on the fall of Jerusalem, which is assigned, on the surely dangerous ground of initials subscribed under the dedication, to a writer who had the misfortune to share these initials with Thomas Deloney. The ballad-writing hack may have been capable of sinking so far below the level of a penny ballad as to perpetrate this monstrous outrage on human patience and on English verse; but the most conclusive evidence would be necessary to persuade a jury of competent readers that a poet must be found guilty of its authorship. And we know that a pamphlet or novelette of Deloney's called 'Thomas of Reading, or the Six Worthy Yeomen of the West,' was ascribed to Dekker until the actual author was discovered.[1] Dr. Grosart, to whom we owe the first collected

[1] It would be a very notable addition to Dekker's claims on our remembrance if he had indeed written the admirable narrative, worthy of Defoe at his very best, which describes with such impressive simplicity of tragic effect the presageful or premonitory anguish of a man on his unconscious way to a sudden and a secret death of unimaginable horror. Had Deloney done more such work as this, and abjured the ineffectual service of an inauspicious Muse, his name would now be famous among the founders and the masters of realistic fiction.

edition of Dekker's pamphlets, says in the introduction to the fifth of his beautiful volumes that he should have doubted the responsibility of Dekker for a poem with which it may perhaps be unfair to saddle even so humble a hackney on the poetic highway as the jaded Pegasus of Deloney, had he not been detected as the author of another religious book. But this latter is a book of the finest and rarest quality—one of its author's most unquestionable claims to immortality in the affection and admiration of all but the most unworthy readers; and 'Canaan's Calamity' is one of the worst metrical samples extant of religious rubbish. As far as such inferential evidence can be allowed to attest anything, the fact of Dekker's having written one of the most beautiful and simple of religious books in prose tends surely rather to disprove than to prove his authorship of one of the feeblest and most pretentious of semi-sacred rhapsodies in verse.

Among his numerous pamphlets, satirical or declamatory, on the manners of his time and the observations of his experience, one alone stands out as distinct from the rest by right of such astonishing superiority in merit of style and interest of matter that I prefer to reserve it for separate and final consideration. But it would require more time and labour than I can afford

to give an adequate account of so many effusions or improvisations as served for fuel to boil the scanty and precarious pot of his uncertain and uncomfortable sustenance. 'The Wonderful Year' of the death of Elizabeth, the accession of James, and the devastation of London by pestilence, supplied him with matter enough for one of his quaintest and liveliest tracts: in which the historical part has no quality so valuable or remarkable as the grotesque mixture of horror and humour in the anecdotes appended 'like a merry epilogue to a dull play, of purpose to shorten the lives of long winter's nights that lie watching in the dark for us,' with touches of rude and vivid pleasantry not unworthy to remind us, I dare not say of the Decameron, but at least of the 'Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles.' In 'The Seven Deadly Sins of London'—one of the milder but less brilliant 'Latterday Pamphlets' of a gentler if no less excitable Carlyle—there are touches of earnest eloquence as well as many quaint and fitful illustrations of social history; but there is less of humorous vigour and straightforward realism than in the preceding tract. And yet there are good things to be gathered out of this effusive and vehement lay sermon: this sentence for example is worth recollection:—'He is not slothful that is only lazy, that only wastes his good hours and his

silver in luxury and licentious ease:—no, he is the true slothful man, that does no good.' And there is genuine insight as well as honesty and courage in his remonstrance with the self-love and appeal against the self-deceit of his countrymen, so prone to cry out on the cruelty of others, on the bloodthirstiness of Frenchmen and Spaniards, and to overlook the heavy-headed brutality of their own habitual indifference and neglect. Although the cruelty of penal laws be now abrogated, yet the condition of the poorest among us is assuredly not such that we can read without a sense of their present veracity the last words of this sentence:—'Thou set'st up posts to whip them when they are alive: set up an hospital to comfort them being sick, or purchase ground for them to dwell in when they be well; *and that is, when they be dead.*' The next of Dekker's tracts is more of a mere imitation than any of his others: the influence of a more famous pamphleteer and satirist, Tom Nash, is here not only manifest as that of a model, but has taken such possession of his disciple that he is hardly more than a somewhat servile copyist; not without a touch of his master's more serious eloquence, but with less than little of his peculiar energy and humour. That rushing wind of satire, that storm of resonant invective, that inexhaustible volubility of con-

tempt, which rages through the controversial writings of the lesser poet, has sunk to a comparative whisper; the roar of his Homeric or Rabelaisian laughter to a somewhat forced and artificial chuckle. This 'News from Hell, brought by the Devil's Carrier,' and containing 'The Devil's Answer to Pierce Penniless,' might have miscarried by the way without much more loss than that of such an additional proof as we could have been content to spare of Dekker's incompetence to deal with a subject which he was curiously fond of handling in earnest and in jest. He seems indeed to have fancied himself, if not something of a Dante, something at least of a Quevedo; but his terrors are merely tedious, and his painted devils would not terrify a babe. In this tract, however, there are now and then some fugitive felicities of expression; and this is more than can be said for either the play or the poem in which he has gone, with feebler if not more uneasy steps than Milton's Satan, over the same ground of burning marl. There is some spirit in the prodigal's denunciation of his miserly father: but the best thing in the pamphlet is the description of the soul of a hero bound for paradise, whose name is given only in the revised and enlarged edition which appeared a year later under the title of 'A Knight's Conjuring; done in earnest;

discovered in jest.' The narrative of 'William Eps his death' is a fine example of that fiery sympathy with soldiers which glows in so many pages of Dekker's verse, and flashes out by fits through the murky confusion of his worst and most formless plays ; but the introduction of this hero is as fine a passage of prose as he has left us.

> The foremost of them was a personage of so composed a presence, that Nature and Fortune had done him wrong, if they had not made him a soldier. *In his countenance there was a kind of indignation, fighting with a kind of exalted joy*, which by his very gesture were apparently decipherable ; for he was jocund, that his soul went out of him in so glorious a triumph ; but disdainfully angry, that she wrought her enlargement through no more dangers : yet were there bleeding witnesses enow on his breast, which testified, he did not yield till he was conquered, and was not conquered, till there was left nothing of a man in him to be overcome.

That the poet's loyalty and devotion were at least as ardent when offered by his gratitude to sailors as to soldiers we may see by this description of 'The Seaman' in his next work.

> A progress doth he take from realm to realm,
> With goodly water-pageants borne before him ;
> The safety of the land sits at his helm,
> No danger here can touch, but what runs o'er him :
> But being in heaven's eye still, it doth restore him
> To livelier spirits ; to meet death with ease,
> *If thou wouldst know thy maker, search the seas.*[1]

[1] The italics are here the author's.

These homely but hearty lines occur in a small and mainly metrical tract bearing a title so quaint that I am tempted to transcribe it at length :— 'The Double PP. A Papist in Arms. Bearing Ten several Shields. Encountered by the Protestant. At Ten several Weapons. A Jesuit Marching before them. Cominùs and Eminùs.' There are a few other vigorous and pointed verses in this little patriotic impromptu, but the greater part of it is merely curious and eccentric doggrel.

The next of Dekker's tracts or pamphlets was the comparatively well-known 'Gull's Horn-book.' This brilliant and vivid little satire is so rich in simple humour, and in lifelike photography taken by the sunlight of an honest and kindly nature, that it stands second only to the author's masterpiece in prose, 'The Bachelor's Banquet,' which has waited so much longer for even the limited recognition implied by a private reprint. There are so many witty or sensible or humorous or grotesque excerpts to be selected from this pamphlet—and not from the parts borrowed or copied from a foreign satire on the habits of slovenly Hollanders—that I take the first which comes under my notice on reopening the book; a study which sets before us in fascinating relief the professional poeticule of a period in which as yet

clubs, coteries, and newspapers were not—or at the worst were nothing to speak of.

If you be a Poet, and come into the Ordinary (though it can be no great glory to be an ordinary Poet) order yourself thus. Observe no man, doff not cap to that gentleman to-day at dinner, to whom, not two nights since, you were beholden for a supper; but, after a turn or two in the room, take occasion (pulling out your gloves) to have some Epigram, or Satire, or Sonnet fastened in one of them, that may (as it were unwittingly to you) offer itself to the Gentlemen: they will presently desire it: but, without much conjuration from them, and a pretty kind of counterfeit lothness in yourself, do not read it; and, though it be none of your own, swear you made it.

This coupling of injunction and prohibition is worthy of Shakespeare or of Sterne.

Marry, if you chance to get into your hands any witty thing of another man's, that is somewhat better, I would counsel you then, if demand be made who composed it, you may say: 'Faith, a learned Gentleman, a very worthy friend.' And this seeming to lay it on another man will be counted either modesty in you, or a sign that you are not ambitious of praise, *or else that you dare not take it upon you, for fear of the sharpness it carries with it.*

The modern poetaster by profession knows a trick worth any two of these: but it is curious to observe the community of baseness, and the comparative innocence of awkwardness and inexperience, which at once connote the species and

denote the specimens of the later and the earlier animalcule.

The 'Jests to make you merry,' which in Dr. Grosart's edition are placed after 'The Gull's Horn-book,' though dated two years earlier, will hardly give so much entertainment to any probable reader in our own time as 'The Misery of a Prison, and a Prisoner,' will give him pain to read of in the closing pages of the same pamphlet, when he remembers how long—at the lowest computation —its author had endured the loathsome and hideous misery which he has described with such bitter and pathetic intensity and persistency in detail. Well may Dr. Grosart say that 'it shocks us to-day, though so far off, to think of 1598 to 1616 onwards covering so sorrowful and humiliating trials for so finely touched a spirit as was Dekker's'; but I think as well as hope that there is no sort of evidence to that surely rather improbable as well as deplorable effect. It may be 'possible,' but it is barely possible, that some 'seven years' continuous imprisonment' is the explanation of an ambiguous phrase which is now incapable of any certain solution, and capable of many an interpretation far less deplorable than this. But in this professedly comic pamphlet there are passages as tragic, if not as powerful, as any in the immortal pages of 'Pickwick' and 'Little Dorrit' which

deal with a later but a too similar phase of prison discipline and tradition.

> The thing that complained was a man :—'Thy days have gone over thee like the dreams of a fool, thy nights like the watchings of a madman.—Oh sacred liberty! with how little devotion do men come into thy temples, when they cannot bestow upon thee too much honour! Thy embracements are more delicate than those of a young bride with her lover, and to be divorced from thee is half to be damned! For what else is a prison but the very next door to hell? It is a man's grave, wherein he walks alive: it is a sea wherein he is always shipwrackt: it is a lodging built out of the world: it is a wilderness where all that wander up and down grow wild, and all that come into it are devoured.'

In Dekker's next pamphlet, his 'Dream,' there are perhaps half a dozen tolerably smooth and vigorous couplets immersed among many more vacuous and vehement in the intensity of their impotence than any reader and admirer of his more happily inspired verse could be expected to believe without evidence adduced. Of imagination, faith, or fancy, the ugly futility of this infernal vision has not—unless I have sought more than once for it in vain—a single saving trace or compensating shadow.

Two years after he had tried his hand at an imitation of Nash, Dekker issued the first of the pamphlets in which he attempted to take up

the succession of Robert Greene as a picaresque writer, or purveyor of guidebooks through the realms of rascaldom. 'The Bellman of London,' or Rogue's Horn-book, begins with a very graceful and fanciful description of the quiet beauty and seclusion of a country retreat in which the author had sought refuge from the turmoil and forgetfulness of the vices of the city; and whence he was driven back upon London by disgust at the discovery of villainy as elaborate and roguery as abject in the beggars and thieves of the country as the most squalid recesses of metropolitan vice or crime could supply. The narrative of this accidental discovery is very lively and spirited in its straightforward simplicity, and the subsequent revelations of rascality are sometimes humorous as well as curious: but the demand for such literature must have been singularly persistent to evoke a sequel to this book next year, 'Lantern and Candle-light, or the Bellman's Second Night-walk,' in which Dekker continues his account of vagrant and villainous society, its lawless laws and its unmannerly manners; and gives the reader some vivid studies, interspersed with facile rhetoric and interlarded with indignant declamation, of the tricks of horsedealers and the shifts of gipsies—or 'moon-men' as he calls them; a race which he regarded with a mixture of angry

perplexity and passionate disgust. 'A Strange Horse-race' between various virtues and vices gives occasion for the display of some allegoric ingenuity and much indefatigable but fatiguing pertinacity in the exposure of the more exalted swindlers of the age—the crafty bankrupts who anticipated the era of the Merdles described by Dickens, but who can hardly have done much immediate injury to a capitalist of the rank of Dekker. Here too there are glimpses of inventive spirit and humorous ingenuity; but the insufferable iteration of jocose demonology and infernal burlesque might tempt the most patient and the most curious of readers to devote the author, with imprecations or invocations as elaborate as his own, to the spiritual potentate whose 'last will and testament' is transcribed into the text of this pamphlet.

In 'The Dead Term' such a reader will find himself more or less relieved by the return of his author to a more terrene and realistic sort of allegory. This recriminatory dialogue between the London and the Westminster of 1608 is now and then rather flatulent in its reciprocity of rhetoric, but is enlivened by an occasional breath of genuine eloquence, and redeemed by touches of historic or social interest. The title and motto of the next year's pamphlet—'Work for Armourers,

or the Peace is Broken.—God help the Poor, the rich can shift'—were presumably designed to attract the casual reader, by what would now be called a sensational device, to consideration of the social question between rich and poor—or, as he puts it, between the rival queens, Poverty and Money. The forces on either side are drawn out and arrayed with pathetic ingenuity, and the result is indicated with a quaint and grim effect of humorous if indignant resignation. 'The Raven's Almanack' of the same year, though portentous in its menace of plague, famine, and civil war, is less noticeable for its moral and religious declamation than for its rather amusing than edifying anecdotes; which, it must again be admitted, in their mixture of jocular sensuality with somewhat ferocious humour, rather remind us of King Louis XI. than of that royal novelist's Italian models or precursors. 'A Rod for Runaways' is the title of a tract which must have somewhat perplexed the readers who came to it for practical counsel or suggestion, seeing that the very title-page calls their attention to the fact that, 'if they look back, they may behold many fearful judgments of God, sundry ways pronounced upon this city, and on several persons, both flying from it, and staying in it.' What the medical gentleman to whom this tract was dedicated may have

thought of the author's logic and theology, we can only conjecture. But even in this little pamphlet there are anecdotes and details which would repay the notice of a social historian as curious in his research and as studious in his condescension as Macaulay.

A prayerbook written or compiled by a poet of Dekker's rank in Dekker's age would have some interest for the reader of a later generation even if it had not the literary charm which distinguishes the little volume of devotions now reprinted from a single and an imperfect copy. We cannot be too grateful for the good fortune and the generous care to which we are indebted for this revelation of a work of genius so curious and so delightful that the most fanatical of atheists or agnostics, the hardest and the driest of philosophers, might be moved and fascinated by the exquisite simplicity of its beauty. Hardly even in those almost incomparable collects which Macaulay so aptly compared with the sonnets of Milton shall we find sentences or passages more perfect in their union of literary grace with ardent sincerity than here. Quaint as are several of the prayers in the professional particulars of their respective appeals, this quaintness has nothing of irreverence or incongruity : and the subtle simplicity of cadence in the rhythmic movement of the style is so nearly

impeccable that we are perplexed to understand how so exquisite an ear as was Dekker's at its best can have been tolerant of such discord or insensible to such collapse as so often disappoints or shocks us in the hastier and cruder passages of his faltering and fluctuating verse. The prayer for a soldier going to battle and his thanksgiving after victory are as noble in the dignity of their devotion as the prayers for a woman in travail and 'for them that visit the sick' are delicate and earnest in their tenderness. The prayer for a prisoner is too beautiful to stand in need of the additional and pathetic interest which it derives from the fact of its author's repeated experience of the misery it expresses with such piteous yet such manful resignation. The style of these faultlessly simple devotions is almost grotesquely set off by the relief of a comparison with the bloated bombast and flatulent pedantry of a prayer by the late Queen Elizabeth which Dekker has transcribed into his text—it is hardly possible to suppose, without perception of the contrast between its hideous jargon and the refined purity of his own melodious English. The prayer for the Council is singularly noble in the eloquence of its patriotism: the prayer for the country is simply magnificent in the austere music of its fervent cadences: the prayer in time of civil war

is so passionate in its cry for deliverance from all danger of the miseries then or lately afflicting the continent that it might well have been put up by a loyal patriot in the very heat of the great war which Dekker might have lived to see break out in his own country. The prayer for the evening is so beautiful as to double our regret for the deplorable mutilation which has deprived us of all but the opening of the morning prayer.[1] The feathers fallen from the wings of these 'Four Birds of Noah's Ark' would be worth more to the literary ornithologist than whole flocks of such 'tame villatic fowl' as people the ordinary coops and hen-roosts of devotional literature.

One work only of Dekker's too often overtasked and heavy-laden genius remains to be noticed; it is one which gives him a high place for ever among English humourists. No sooner has the reader run his eye over the first three or four pages than he feels himself, with delight and astonishment, in the company of a writer whose genius is akin at once to Goldsmith's and to Thackeray's; a writer whose style is so pure and vigorous, so lucid and straightforward, that we

[1] A noticeable instance of the use of a common word in the original and obsolete sense of its derivation may be cited from the unfortunately truncated and scanty fragment of a prayer for the court: 'Oh Lord, be thou a husband' (house-band) 'to that great household of our King.'

seem to have already entered upon the best age of English prose. Had Mr. Matthew Arnold, instead of digging in Chapman for preposterous barbarisms and eccentricities of pedantry, chanced to light upon this little treatise; or had he condescended to glance over Daniel's compact and admirable 'Defence of Rhyme'; he would have found in writers of the despised Shakespearean epoch much more than a foretaste of those excellent qualities which he imagined to have been first imported into our literature by writers of the age of Dryden. The dialogue of the very first couple introduced with such skilful simplicity of presentation at the opening of Dekker's pamphlet is worthy of Sterne: the visit of the gossip or kinswoman in the second chapter is worthy of Molière; and the humours of the monthly nurse in the third are worthy of Dickens. The lamentations of the lady for the decay of her health and beauty in consequence of her obsequious husband's alleged neglect, 'no more like the woman I was than an apple is like an oyster'; the description of the poor man making her broth with his own hands, jeered at by the maids and trampled underfoot by Mrs. Gamp; the preparations for the christening supper and the preliminary feast of scandal; are full of such bright and rich humour as to recall even the creator of Dogberry and Mrs. Quickly. It is of

Shakespeare again that we are reminded in the next chapter, by the description of the equipage to which the husband of 'a woman that hath a charge of children' is reduced when he has to ride to the assizes in sorrier plight than Petruchio rode in to his wedding; the details remind us also of Balzac in the minute and grotesque intensity of their industrious realism: but the scene on his return reminds us rather of Thackeray at the best of his bitterest mood—the terrible painter of Mrs. Mackenzie and Mrs. General Baynes. 'The humour of a woman that marries her inferior by birth' deals with more serious matters in a style not unworthy of Boccaccio; and no comedy of the time—Shakespeare's always excepted—has a scene in it of richer and more original humour than brightens the narrative which relates the woes of the husband who invites his friends to dinner and finds everything under lock and key. Hardly in any of Dekker's plays is the comic dialogue so masterly as here—so vivid and so vigorous in its lifelike ease and spontaneity. But there is not one of the fifteen chapters, devoted each to the description of some fresh 'humour,' which would not deserve, did space and time allow of it, a separate note of commentary. The book is simply one of the very finest examples of humorous literature, touched now and then with serious and

even tragic effect, that can be found in any language; it is generally and comparatively remarkable for its freedom from all real coarseness or brutality, though the inevitable change of manners between Shakespeare's time and our own may make some passages or episodes seem now and then somewhat over particular in plain-speaking or detail. But a healthier, manlier, more thoroughly good-natured and good-humoured book was never written; nor one in which the author's real and respectful regard for womanhood was more perceptible through the veil of a satire more pure from bitterness and more honest in design.

The list of works over which we have now glanced is surely not inconsiderable; and yet the surviving productions of Dekker's genius or necessity are but part of the labours of his life. If he wanted—as undoubtedly he would seem to have wanted—that 'infinite capacity for taking pains' which Carlyle professed to regard as the synonym of genius, he was at least not deficient in that rough and ready diligence which is habitually in harness, and cheerfully or resignedly prepared for the day's work. The names of his lost plays—all generally suggestive of some true dramatic interest, now graver and now lighter—are too numerous to transcribe: but one at least of them must excite unspeakable amazement as well as indiscreet

curiosity in every reader of Ariosto or La Fontaine who comes in the course of the catalogue upon such a title as 'Jocondo and Astolfo.' How on earth the famous story of Giocondo could possibly be adapted for representation on the public stage of Shakespearean London is a mystery which the execrable cook of the execrable Warburton has left for ever insoluble and inconceivable: for to that female fiend, the object of Sir Walter Scott's antiquarian imprecations, we owe, unless my memory misguides me, the loss of this among other irredeemable treasures.

To do justice upon the faults of this poet is easy for any sciolist: to do justice to his merits is less easy for the most competent scholar and the most appreciative critic. In despite of his rare occasional spurts or outbreaks of self-assertion or of satire, he seems to stand before us a man of gentle, modest, shiftless and careless nature, irritable and placable, eager and unsteady, full of excitable kindliness and deficient in strenuous principle; loving the art which he professionally followed, and enjoying the work which he occasionally neglected. There is no unpoetic note in his best poetry such as there is too often—nay, too constantly—in the severer work and the stronger genius of Ben Jonson. What he might have done under happier auspices, or with a

tougher fibre of resolution and perseverance in his character, it is waste of time and thought for his most sympathetic and compassionate admirers to assume or to conjecture: what he has done, with all its shortcomings and infirmities, is enough to secure for him a distinct and honourable place among the humourists and the poets of his country.

JOHN MARSTON

If justice has never been done, either in his own day or in any after age, to a poet of real genius and original powers, it will generally be presumed, with more or less fairness or unfairness, that this is in great part his own fault. Some perversity or obliquity will be suspected, even if no positive infirmity or deformity can be detected, in his intelligence or in his temperament: some taint or some flaw will be assumed to affect and to vitiate his creative instinct or his spiritual reason. And in the case of John Marston, the friend and foe of Ben Jonson, the fierce and foul-mouthed satirist, the ambitious and overweening tragedian, the scornful and passionate humourist, it is easy for the shallowest and least appreciative reader to perceive the nature and to estimate the weight of such drawbacks or impediments as have so long and so seriously interfered with the due recognition of an independent and remarkable poet. The praise and the blame, the admiration and the dis-

taste excited by his works, are equally just, but are seemingly incompatible: the epithets most exactly appropriate to the style of one scene, one page, one speech in a scene or one passage in a speech, are most ludicrously inapplicable to the next. An anthology of such noble and beautiful excerpts might be collected from his plays, that the reader who should make his first acquaintance with this poet through the deceptive means of so flattering an introduction would be justified in supposing that he had fallen in with a tragic dramatist of the very highest order—with a new candidate for a station in the very foremost rank of English poets. And if the evil star which seems generally to have presided over the literary fortunes of John Marston should misguide the student, on first opening a volume of his works, into some such arid or miry tract of wilderness as too frequently deforms the face of his uneven and irregular demesne, the inevitable sense of disappointment and repulsion which must immediately ensue will too probably discourage a casual explorer from any renewal of his research.

Two of the epithets which Ben Jonson, in his elaborate attack on Marston, selected for ridicule as characteristically grotesque instances of affected and infelicitous innovation—but which nevertheless have taken root in the language, and practi-

cally justified their adoption—describe as happily as any that could be chosen to describe the better and the worse quality of his early tragic and satiric style. These words are 'strenuous' and 'clumsy.' It is perpetually, indefatigably, and fatiguingly strenuous; it is too often vehemently, emphatically, and laboriously clumsy. But at its best, when the clumsy and ponderous incompetence of expression which disfigures it is supplanted by a strenuous felicity of ardent and triumphant aspiration, it has notes and touches in the compass of its course not unworthy of Webster or Tourneur or even Shakespeare himself. Its occasionally exquisite delicacy is as remarkable as its more frequent excess of coarseness, awkwardness, or violent and elaborate extravagance. No sooner has he said anything especially beautiful, pathetic, or sublime, than the evil genius must needs take his turn, exact as it were the forfeit of his bond, impel the poet into some sheer perversity, deface the flow and form of the verse with some preposterous crudity or flatulence of phrase which would discredit the most incapable or the most fantastic novice. And the worst of it all is that he limps or stumbles with either foot alternately. At one moment he exaggerates the license of artificial rhetoric, the strain and swell of the most high-flown and hyperbolical poetic diction; at the next,

he falls flat upon the naked level of insignificant or offensive realism.

These are no slight charges; and it is impossible for any just or sober judgment to acquit John Marston of the impeachment conveyed in them. The answer to it is practical and simple: it is that his merits are great enough to outweigh and overshadow them all. Even if his claim to remembrance were merely dependent on the value of single passages, this would suffice to secure him his place of honour in the train of Shakespeare. If his most ambitious efforts at portraiture of character are often faulty at once in colour and in outline, some of his slighter sketches have a freshness and tenderness of beauty which may well atone for the gravest of his certainly not infrequent offences. The sweet constancy and gentle fortitude of a Beatrice and a Mellida remain in the memory more clearly, leave a more lifelike impression of truth on the reader's mind, than the light-headed profligacy and passionate instability of such brainless and bloodthirsty wantons as Franceschina and Isabella. In fact, the better characters in Marston's plays are better drawn, less conventional, more vivid and more human than those of the baser sort. Whatever of moral credit may be due to a dramatist who paints virtue better than vice, and has a happier hand at

a hero's likeness than at a villain's, must unquestionably be assigned to the author of 'Antonio and Mellida.' Piero, the tyrant and traitor, is little more than a mere stage property: like Mendoza in 'The Malcontent' and Syphax in 'Sophonisba,' he would be a portentous ruffian if he had a little more life in him; he has to do the deeds and express the emotions of a most bloody and crafty miscreant; but it is only now and then that we catch the accent of a real man in his tones of cajolery or menace, dissimulation or triumph. Andrugio, the venerable and heroic victim of his craft and cruelty, is a figure not less living and actual than stately and impressive: the changes of mood from meditation to passion, from resignation to revolt, from tenderness to resolution, which mark the development of the character with the process of the action, though painted rather broadly than subtly and with more of vigour than of care, show just such power of hand and sincerity of instinct as we fail to find in the hot and glaring colours of his rival's monotonous ruffianism. Again, in 'The Wonder of Women,' the majestic figures of Massinissa, Gelosso, and Sophonisba stand out in clearer relief than the traitors of the senate, the lecherous malignity of Syphax, or the monstrous profile of the sorceress Erichtho. In this laboured and ambitious tragedy, as in the two

parts of 'Antonio and Mellida,' we see the poet at his best—and also at his worst. A vehement and resolute desire to give weight to every line and emphasis to every phrase has too often misled him into such brakes and jungles of crabbed and convulsive bombast, of stiff and tortuous exuberance, that the reader in struggling through some of the scenes and speeches feels as though he were compelled to push his way through a cactus hedge: the hot and heavy blossoms of rhetoric blaze and glare out of a thickset fence of jagged barbarisms and exotic monstrosities of metaphor. The straining and sputtering declamation of narrative and oratory scarcely succeeds in expressing through a dozen quaint and far-fetched words or phrases what two or three of the simplest would easily and amply have sufficed to convey. But when the poet is content to deliver his message like a man of this world, we discover with mingled satisfaction, astonishment, and irritation that he can write when he pleases in a style of the purest and noblest simplicity; that he can make his characters converse in a language worthy of Sophocles when he does not prefer to make them stutter in a dialect worthy of Lycophron. And in the tragedy of 'Sophonisba' the display of this happy capacity is happily reserved for the crowning scene of the poem. It would be difficult to find anywhere a

more preposterous or disjointed piece of jargon than the speech of Asdrubal at the close of the second act:—

> Brook open scorn, faint powers!—
> Make good the camp!—No, fly!—yes, what?—wild rage!—
> To be a prosperous villain! yet some heat, some hold;
> But to burn temples, and yet freeze, O cold!
> Give me some health; now your blood sinks: thus deeds
> Ill nourished rot: without Jove nought succeeds.

And yet this passage occurs in a poem which contains such a passage as the following:—

> And now with undismayed resolve behold,
> To save you—you—for honour and just faith
> Are most true gods, which we should much adore—
> With even disdainful vigour I give up
> An abhorred life!—You have been good to me,
> And I do thank thee, heaven. O my stars,
> I bless your goodness, that with breast unstained,
> Faith pure, a virgin wife, tried to my glory,
> I die, of female faith the long-lived story;
> Secure from bondage and all servile harms,
> But more, most happy in my husband's arms.

The lofty sweetness, the proud pathos, the sonorous simplicity of these most noble verses might scarcely suffice to attest the poet's possession of any strong dramatic faculty. But the scene immediately preceding bears evidence of a capacity for terse and rigorous brevity of dialogue

in a style as curt and condensed as that of Tacitus or Dante.

Sophonisba. What unjust grief afflicts my worthy lord?
Massinissa. Thank me, ye gods, with much beholdingness;
For, mark, I do not curse you.
Sophonisba. Tell me, sweet,
The cause of thy much anguish.
Massinissa. Ha, the cause?
Let's see; wreathe back thine arms, bend down thy neck,
Practise base prayers, make fit thyself for bondage.
Sophonisba. Bondage!
Massinissa. Bondage: Roman bondage.
Sophonisba. No, no![1]
Massinissa. How then have I vowed well to Scipio?
Sophonisba. How then to Sophonisba?
Massinissa. Right: which way
Run mad? impossible distraction![2]
Sophonisba. Dear lord, thy patience; let it maze all power,
And list to her in whose sole heart it rests
To keep thy faith upright.

[1] This verse, unmusical to an English ear, is good Italian metre; possibly an intentional and deliberate example of the poet's Italian predilections, and if so certainly a less irrational and inexplicable one than the intrusion of some villainously bad Italian lines and phrases into the text of 'Antonio and Mellida.'

[2] In other words—intolerable or unimaginable division or divulsion of mind and spirit between two contending calls of honour, two irreconcilable claims of duty. Modern editors of this great scene have broken up the line into pieces, marked or divided by superfluous dashes and points of exclamation. Campbell, who had the good taste to confute his own depreciatory criticism of Marston by including the passage among his 'Selections,' was the first, as far as I know, to adopt this erroneous and rather spasmodic punctuation.

Massinissa. Wilt thou be slaved?
Sophonisba. No; free.
Massinissa. How then keep I my faith?
Sophonisba. My death
Gives help to all. From Rome so rest we free:
So brought to Scipio, faith is kept in thee.
Massinissa. Thou darest not die!—Some wine.—
Thou darest not die!
Sophonisba. How near was I unto the curse of man, Joy!
How like was I yet once to have been glad!
He that ne'er laughed may with a constant face
Contemn Jove's frown. Happiness makes us base.

The man or the boy does not seem to me enviable who can read or remember these verses without a thrill. In sheer force of concision they recall the manner of Alfieri; but that noble tragic writer could hardly have put such fervour of austere passion into the rigid utterance, or touched the note of emotion with such a glowing depth of rapture. That 'bitter and severe delight'—if I may borrow the superb phrase of Landor—which inspires and sustains the imperial pride of self-immolation might have found in his dramatic dialect an expression as terse and as sincere: it could hardly have clothed itself with such majestic and radiant solemnity of living and breathing verse. The rapid elliptic method of amœbæan dialogue is more in his manner than in any English poet's known to me except the writer of

this scene; but indeed Marston is in more points than one the most Italian of our dramatists. His highest tone of serious poetry has in it, like Alfieri's, a note of self-conscious stoicism and somewhat arrogant self-control; while as a comic writer he is but too apt, like too many transalpine wits, to mistake filth for fun, and to measure the neatness of a joke by its nastiness. Dirt for dirt's sake has never been the apparent aim of any great English humourist who had not about him some unmistakable touch of disease—some inheritance of evil or of suffering like the congenital brain-sickness of Swift or the morbid infirmity of Sterne. A poet of so high an order as the author of 'Sophonisba' could hardly fail to be in general a healthier writer than such as these; but it cannot be denied that he seems to have been somewhat inclined to accept the illogical inference which would argue that because some wit is dirty all dirt must be witty—because humour may sometimes be indecent, indecency must always be humorous. 'The clartier the cosier' was an old proverb among the northern peasantry while yet recalcitrant against the inroads of sanitary reform: 'the dirtier the droller' would seem to have been practically the no less irrational motto of many not otherwise unadmirable comic writers. It does happen that the

drollest character in all Marston's plays is also the most offensive in his language—'the foulest-mouthed profane railing brother'; but the drollest passages in the whole part are those that least want washing. How far the example of Ben Jonson may have influenced or encouraged Marston in the indulgence of this unlovely propensity can only be conjectured; it is certain that no third writer of the time, however given to levity of speech or audacity in the selection of a subject, was so prone—in Shakespeare's phrase—to 'talk greasily' as the authors of 'Bartholomew Fair' and 'The Dutch Courtesan.'

In the two parts of his earlier tragedy the interest is perhaps, on the whole, rather better sustained than in 'The Wonder of Women.' The prologue to 'Antonio's Revenge' (the second part of the 'Historie of Antonio and Mellida') has enjoyed the double correlative honour of ardent appreciation by Lamb and responsive depreciation by Gifford. Its eccentricities and perversities of phrase[1] may be no less noticeable, but should assuredly be accounted less memorable, than its profound and impassioned fervour of grave and eloquent harmony. Strange, wayward and savage as is the all but impossible story, rude and

[1] One strange phrase in the very first line is surely a palpable misprint—*ramps* for *cramps*.

crude and crabbed as is the pedantically exuberant language of these plays, there are touches in them of such terrible beauty and such terrible pathos as to convince any competent reader that they deserve the tribute of such praise and such dispraise. The youngest student of Lamb's 'Specimens' can hardly fail to recognise this when he compares the vivid and piercing description of the death of Mellida with the fearful and supernatural impression of the scene which brings or thrusts before us the immolation of the child her brother.

The laboured eccentricity of style which signalises and disfigures the three chief tragedies or tragic poems of Marston is tempered and subdued to a soberer tone of taste and a more rational choice of expression in his less ambitious and less unequal works. It is almost impossible to imagine any insertion or addition from the hand of Webster which would not be at once obvious to any reader in the text of 'Sophonisba' or in either part of 'Antonio and Mellida.' Their fierce and irregular magnificence, their feverish and strenuous intemperance of rhetoric, would have been too glaringly in contrast with the sublime purity of the greater poet's thought and style. In the tragicomedy of 'The Malcontent,' published two years later than the earlier and two

years earlier than the later of these poems, if the tone of feeling is but little changed or softened, the language is duly clarified and simplified. 'The Malcontent, (augmented) by Marston, with the additions written by John Webster,' is as coherent, as harmonious, as much of a piece throughout, as was the text of the play in its earlier state. Not all the conscientious art and skill of Webster could have given this uniformity to a work in which the original design and execution had been less in keeping with the bent of his own genius and the accent of his natural style. Sad and stern, not unhopeful or unloving, the spirit of this poem is more in harmony with that of Webster's later tragedies than with that of Marston's previous plays; its accent is sardonic rather than pessimistic, ironical rather than despondent. The plot is neither well conceived nor well constructed; the catastrophe is little less than absurd, especially from the ethical or moral point of view; the characters are thinly sketched, the situations at once forced and conventional; there are few sorrier or stranger figures in serious fiction than that of the penitent usurper when he takes to his arms his repentant wife, together with one of her two paramours, in a sudden rapture of forgiving affection; the part which gives the play its name is the only one drawn

with any firmness of outline, unless we except that of the malignant and distempered old parasite; but there is a certain interest in the awkward evolution of the story, and there are scenes and passages of singular power and beauty which would suffice to redeem the whole work from condemnation or oblivion, even though it had not the saving salt in it of an earnest and evident sincerity. The brooding anger, the resentful resignation, the impatient spirit of endurance, the bitter passion of disdain, which animate the utterance and direct the action of the hero, are something more than dramatically appropriate; it is as obvious that these are the mainsprings of the poet's own ambitious and dissatisfied intelligence, sullen in its reluctant submission and ardent in its implacable appeal, as that his earlier undramatic satires were the tumultuous and turbid ebullitions of a mood as morbid, as restless, and as honest. Coarse, rough, and fierce as those satires are, inferior alike to Hall's in finish of verse and to Donne's in weight of matter, it seems to me that Dr. Grosart, their first careful and critical editor, is right in claiming for them equal if not superior credit on the score of earnestness. The crude ferocity of their invective has about it a savour of honesty which atones for many defects of literary taste and executive art;

and after a more thorough study than such rude and unattractive work seems at first to require or to deserve, the moral and intellectual impression of the whole will not improbably be far more favourable than one resulting from a cursory survey or derived from a casual selection of excerpts. They bring no manner of support to a monstrous and preposterous imputation which has been cast upon their author; the charge of having been concerned in a miserably malignant and stupid attempt at satire under the form of a formless and worthless drama called 'Histriomastix';[1] though his partnership in another anonymous play—a semi-romantic semi-satirical comedy called 'Jack Drum's Entertainment'—is very much more plausibly supportable by comparison of special phrases as well as of general style with sundry mannerisms as well as with the habitual turn of speech in Marston's acknowledged comedies. There is a certain incomposite and indigestive vigour in the language of this play which makes the attribution of a principal share in its authorship neither utterly discreditable to Marston nor absolutely improbable in itself; and

[1] This abortion of letters is such a very mooncalf, begotten by malice on idiocy, that no human creature above the intellectual level of its author will ever dream of attempting to decipher the insignificant significance which may possibly—though improbably—lie latent under the opaque veil of its inarticulate virulence.

the satire aimed at Ben Jonson, if not especially relevant to the main action, is at all events less incongruous and preposterous in its relation to the rest of the work than the satirical or controversial part of Dekker's 'Satiromastix.' But on the whole, if this play be Marston's, it seems to me the rudest and the poorest he has left us, except perhaps the comedy of 'What you Will,' in which several excellent and suggestive situations are made less of than they should have been, and a good deal of promising comic invention is wasted for want of a little more care and a little more conscience in cultivation of material and composition of parts. The satirical references to Jonson are more pointed and effective in this comedy than in either of the two plays last mentioned; but its best claim to remembrance is to be sought in the admirable soliloquy which relates the seven years' experience of the student and his spaniel. Marston is too often heaviest when he would and should be lightest—owing apparently to a certain infusion of contempt for light comedy as something rather beneath him, not wholly worthy of his austere and ambitious capacity. The parliament of pages in this play is a diverting interlude of farce, though a mere irrelevance and impediment to the action; but the boys are less amusing than their compeers in the anonymous

comedy of 'Sir Giles Goosecap,' first published in the year preceding: a work of genuine humour and invention, excellent in style if somewhat infirm in construction, for a reprint of which we are indebted to the previous care of Marston's present editor. Far be it from me to intrude on the barren and boggy province of hypothetical interpretation and controversial commentary; but I may observe in passing that the original of Simplicius Faber in 'What you Will' must surely have been the same hanger-on or sycophant of Ben Jonson's who was caricatured by Dekker in his 'Satiromastix' under the name of Asinius Bubo. The gross assurance of self-complacent duncery, the apish arrogance and imitative dogmatism of reflected self-importance and authority at second hand, are presented in either case with such identity of tone and colouring that we can hardly imagine the satire to have been equally applicable to two contemporary satellites of the same imperious and masterful egoist.

That the same noble poet and high-souled humourist was not responsible for the offence given to Caledonian majesty in the comedy of 'Eastward Ho,' the authentic word of Jonson would be sufficient evidence; but I am inclined to think it a matter of almost certain likelihood—if not of almost absolute proof—that Chapman was

as innocent as Jonson of a jest for which Marston must be held responsible—though scarcely, I should imagine, blamable at the present day by the most rabid of Scottish provincialists. In the last scene of 'The Malcontent' a court lady says to an infamous old hanger-on of the court—'And is not Signor St. Andrew a gallant fellow now?' to which the old hag replies—'Honour and he agree as well together as a satin suit and woollen stockings.' The famous passage in the comedy which appeared a year later must have been far less offensive to the most nervous patriotism than this; and the impunity of so gross an insult, so obviously and obtrusively offered, to the new knightships and lordships of King James's venal chivalry and parasitic nobility, may naturally have encouraged the satirist to repeat his stroke next year—and must have astounded his retrospection, when he found himself in prison, and under threat of worse than imprisonment, together with his unoffending associates in an admirable and inoffensive comedy. It is impossible to suppose that he would not have come forward to assume the responsibility of his own words—as it is impossible to imagine that Jonson or Chapman would have given up his accomplice to save himself. But the law of the day would probably have held them all responsible alike.

In the same year as 'Eastward Ho' appeared the best and completest piece of work which we owe to the single hand of Marston. A more brilliant and amusing play than 'The Dutch Courtesan,' better composed, better constructed, and better written, it would be difficult to discover among the best comic and romantic works of its incomparable period. The slippery and sanguinary strumpet who gives its name to the play is sketched with such admirable force and freedom of hand as to suggest the existence of an actual model who may unconsciously have sat for the part under the scrutiny of eyes as keen and merciless as ever took notes for a savagely veracious caricature—or for an unscrupulously moral exposure. The jargon in which her emotions are expressed is as Shakespearean in its breadth and persistency as that of Dr. Caius or Captain Fluellen; but the reality of those emotions is worthy of a less farcical vehicle for the expression of such natural craft and passion. The sisters, Beatrice and Crispinella, seem at first too evidently imitated from the characters of Aurelia and Phœnixella in the earliest surviving comedy of Ben Jonson; but the 'comedy daughter,' as Dickens (or Skimpole) would have expressed it, is even more coarsely and roughly drawn than in the early sketch of the more famous dramatist.

On the other hand, it must be allowed—though it may not be recognised without a certain sense of surprise—that the nobler and purer type of womanhood or girlhood which we owe to the hand of Marston is far above comparison with any which has been accomplished or achieved by the studious and vehement elaboration of Ben Jonson's. The servility of subservience which that great dramatist exacts from his typically virtuous women—from the abject and anæmic wife of a Corvino or a Fitzdottrel—is a quality which could not coexist with the noble and loving humility of Marston's Beatrice. The admirable scene in which she is brought face to face with the impudent pretentions of the woman who asserts herself to have been preferred by the betrothed lover of the expectant bride is as pathetic and impressive as it is lifelike and original; and even in the excess of gentleness and modesty which prompts the words—'I will love you the better; I cannot hate what he affected'—there is nothing less noble or less womanly than in the subsequent reply to the harlot's repeated taunts and inventions of insult. 'He did not ill not to love me, but sure he did not well to mock me: gentle minds will pity, though they cannot love; yet peace and my love sleep with him.' The powerful soliloquy which closes the scene expresses no

more than the natural emotion of the man who has received so lovely a revelation of his future bride's invincible and single-hearted love.

> Cannot that woman's evil, jealousy,
> Despite disgrace, nay, which is worse, contempt,
> Once stir thy faith?

Coarse as is often the language of Marston's plays and satires, the man was not coarse-minded—not gross of spirit nor base of nature—who could paint so delicately and simply a figure so beautiful in the tenderness of its purity.

The farcical underplot of this play is worthy of Molière in his broader mood of farce. Hardly any Jourdain or Pourceaugnac, any George Dandin or Comtesse d'Escarbagnas of them all, undergoes a more grotesque experience or plays a more ludicrous part than is devised for Mr. and Mrs. Mulligrub by the ingenuity of the indefatigable Cocledemoy—a figure worthy to stand beside any of the tribe of Mascarille as *fourbum imperator*. The animation and variety of inventive humour which keep the reader's laughing attention awake and amused throughout these adventurous scenes of incident and intrigue are not more admirable than the simplicity and clearness of evolution or composition which recall and rival the classic masterpieces of Latin and French comedy. There is perhaps equal fertility of humour, but there

certainly is not equal harmony of structure in the play which Marston published next year—'Parasitaster, or the Fawn'; a name probably suggested by that of Ben Jonson's 'Poetaster,' in which the author had himself been the subject of a greater man's rage and ridicule. The wealth and the waste of power displayed and paraded in this comedy are equally admirable and lamentable; for the brilliant effect of its various episodes and interludes is not more obvious than the eclipse of the central interest, the collapse of the serious design, which results from the agglomeration of secondary figures and the alternations of perpetual byplay. Three or four better plays might have been made out of the materials here hurled and huddled together into one. The Isabelle of Molière is not more amusing or more delightful in her audacity of resource, in her combination of loyalty with duplicity, innocence with intrigue, than the daring and single-hearted young heroine of this play; but the 'École des Maris' is not encumbered with such a crowd of minor interests and characters, of subordinate humours and complications, as the reader of Marston's comedy finds interposed and intruded between his attention and the main point of interest. He would fain see more of Dulcimel and Tiberio, the ingenious and enterprising princess, the ingenuous and responsive prince; he is willing

to see as much as is shown him of their fathers, the masquerading philosopher and the self-complacent dupe; Granuffo, the patrician prototype of Captain John Bunsby, may take a seat in the chambers of his memory beside the commander of the Cautious Clara; the humours of a jealous foul-minded fool and a somewhat audaciously virtuous wife may divert him by the inventive and vigorous exposure of their various revolutions and results; but the final impression is one of admiring disappointment and possibly ungrateful regret that so much energetic satire and so much valuable time should have been spent on the somewhat nauseous follies of 'sickly knights' and 'vicious braggarts' that the really admirable and attractive parts of the design are cramped and crowded out of room for the due development of their just and requisite proportions.

A more eccentric, uneven, and incomposite piece of work than 'The Insatiate Countess' it would be difficult to find in English or in other literature. The opening scene is picturesque and impressive; the closing scene of the serious part is noble and pathetic; but the intervening action is of a kind which too often aims at the tragic and hits the burlesque. The incessant inconstancy of passion which hurries the fantastic heroine through such a miscellaneous multitude of improvised in-

trigues is rather a comic than a tragic motive for the conduct of a play; and the farcical rapidity with which the puppets revolve makes it impossible for the most susceptible credulity to take any real interest or feel any real belief in the perpetual rotation of their feverish moods and motives, their irrational doings and sufferings. The humour of the underplot constantly verges on horseplay, and is certainly neither delicate nor profound; but there is matter enough for mirth in it to make the reader duly grateful for the patient care and admirable insight which Mr. Bullen has brought to bear upon the really formidable if apparently trivial task of reducing the chaotic corruption and confusion of the text to reasonable form and comprehensible order. William Barkstead, a narrative poet of real merit, and an early minister at the shrine of Shakespeare, has been credited with the authorship of this play: I am inclined to agree with the suggestion of its latest editor—its first editor in any serious sense of the word—that both he and Marston may have had a hand in it. His 'Myrrha' belongs to the same rather morbid class of poems as Shakespeare's 'Venus and Adonis' and Marston's 'Pygmalion's Image.' Of the three Shakespeare's is not more certainly the finest in occasional touches of picturesque poetry than it is incomparably the most offensive to good taste and

natural instinct on the score of style and treatment. Marlowe's 'Hero and Leander' can only be classed with these elaborate studies of sensual aberration or excess by those 'who can see no difference between Titian and French photographs.' (I take leave, for once in a way, to quote from a private letter—long since addressed to the present commentator by the most illustrious of writers on art.)

There are some pretty verses and some ingenious touches in Marston's 'Entertainment,' offered to Lady Derby by her daughter and son-in-law; but the Latinity of his city pageant can scarcely have satisfied the pupil of Buchanan, unless indeed the reputation of King James's tutor as a Latin versifier or master of prosody has been scandalously usurped under the falsest of pretences: a matter on which I am content to accept the verdict of Landor. His contribution to Sir Robert Chester's problematic volume may perhaps claim the singular distinction of being more incomprehensible, more crabbed, more preposterous, and more inexplicable than any other copy of verses among the 'divers poetical essays—done by the best and chiefest of our modern writers, with their names subscribed to their particular works,' in which Marston has the honour to stand next to Shakespeare; and however far he may be from

any pretention to rival the incomparable charm of Shakespeare's opening quatrain—incomparable in its peculiar melody and mystery except with other lyrics of Shakespeare's or of Shelley's, it must, I think, be admitted that an impartial student of both effusions will assign to Marston rather than to Shakespeare the palm of distinction on the score of tortuous obscurity and enigmatic verbiage. It may be—as it seems to me—equally difficult to make sense of the greater and the lesser poet's riddles and rhapsodies; but on the whole I cannot think that Shakespeare's will be found so desperately indigestible by the ordinary intelligence of manhood as Marston's. 'The turtles fell to work, and ate each other up,' in a far more comprehensible and reasonable poem of Hood's; and most readers of Chester's poem and the verses appended to it will be inclined to think that it might have been as well—except for a few lines of Shakespeare's and of Jonson's which we could not willingly spare—if the Phœnix and Turtle had set them the example.

If the apparently apocryphal 'Mountebank's Masque' be really the work of Marston—and it is both coarse enough and clever enough to deserve the attribution of his authorship—there is a singular echo in it from the opening of Jonson's 'Poetaster,' the furious dramatic satire which

blasted for upwards of two centuries the fame or the credit of the poet to whose hand this masque has been hitherto assigned. In it, after a full allowance of rough and ribald jocosity, the presence of a poet becomes manifest with the entrance of an allegoric figure whose declamatory address begins with these words :—

> Light, I salute thee ; I, Obscurity,
> The son of Darkness and forgetful Lethe ;
> I, that envý thy brightness, greet thee now,
> Enforced by Fate.

Few readers of these lines will forget the verses with which Envy plays prologue to 'Poetaster, or his Arraignment.'

> Light, I salute thee, but with wounded nerves,
> Wishing thy golden splendour pitchy darkness.

Whoever may be the author of this masque, there are two or three couplets well worth remembrance in one of the two versions of its text.

> It is a life is never ill
> To lie and sleep in roses still.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Who would not hear the nightingale still sing,
> Or who grew ever weary of the spring ?
> The day must have her night, the spring her fall,
> All is divided, none is lord of all.

These verses are worthy of a place in any one of Mr. Bullen's beautiful and delightful volumes of

lyrics from Elizabethan song-books; and higher praise than this no lyrical poet could reasonably desire.

An inoffensive monomaniac, who thought fit to reprint a thing in dramatic or quasi-dramatic form to which I have already referred in passing—'Histriomastix, or the Player Whipt,'—thought likewise fit to attribute to John Marston, of all men on earth, a share in the concoction of this shapeless and unspeakable piece of nonsense. The fact that one of the puppets in the puppetshow is supposed to represent a sullen scholar, disappointed, impoverished, and virulent, would have suggested to a rational reader that the scribbler who gave vent to the impotence of his rancour in this hopeless ebullition of envious despair had set himself to ape the habitual manner of Jonson and the occasional manner of Marston with about as much success as might be expected from a malignant monkey when attempting to reproduce in his grimaces the expression of human indignation and contempt. But to students of natural or literary history who cannot discern the human from the simious element it suggests that the man thus imitated must needs have been the imitator of himself; and the fact that the whole attempt at satire is directed against dramatic poetry—that all the drivelling venom of a dunce's denunciation,

all the virulent slaver of his grovelling insolence, is aimed at the stage for which Marston was employed in writing—weighs nothing in the scales of imbecility against the consideration that Marston's or Jonson's manner is here and there more or less closely imitated ; that we catch now and then some such echo of his accent, some such savour of his style, as may be discovered or imagined in the very few scattered lines which show any glimmer of capacity for composition or versification. The eternal theme of envy, invented by Jonson and worked to death by its inventor, was taken up again by Marston and treated with a vigorous acerbity not always unworthy of comparison with Jonson's : the same conception inspired with something of eloquence the malignant idiocy of the satirical dunce who has left us, interred and imbedded in a mass of rubbish, a line or two like these which he has put into the mouth of his patron saint or guardian goddess, the incarnate essence of Envy.

> Turn, turn, thou lackey to the wingèd time!
> I envy thee in that thou art so slow,
> And I so swift to mischief.

But the entire affair is obviously an effusion and an example of the same academic sagacity or lucidity of appreciation which found utterance in other contemporary protests of the universities

against the universe. In that abyss of dullness 'The Return from Parnassus,' a reader or a diver who persists in his thankless toil will discover this pearl of a fact—that men of culture had no more hesitation in preferring Watson to Shakespeare than they have in preferring Byron to Shelley. The author of the one deserves to have been the author of the other. Nobody can have been by nature such a fool as to write either: art, education, industry, and study were needful to achieve such composite perfection of elaborate and consummate idiocy.

There is a good deal of bad rubbish, and there is some really brilliant and vigorous writing, in the absurdly named and absurdly constructed comedy of 'Jack Drum's Entertainment'; but in all other points—in plot, incident, and presentation of character—it is so scandalously beneath contempt that I am sorry to recognise the hand of Marston in a play which introduces us to a 'noble father,' the model of knightly manhood and refined good sense, who on the news of a beloved daughter's disappearance instantly proposes to console himself with a heavy drinking-bout. No graver censure can be passed on the conduct of the drama than the admission that this monstrous absurdity is not out of keeping with the rest of it. There is hardly a single character in all its rabble

rout of lunatics who behaves otherwise than would beseem a probationary candidate for Bedlam. Yet I fear there is more serious evidence of a circumstantial kind in favour of the theory which would saddle the fame of Marston with the charge of its authorship than such as depends on peculiarities of metre and eccentricities of phrase. Some other poet—though I know of none such—may have accepted and adopted his theory that 'vengeance' must count in verse as a word of three syllables: I can hardly believe that the fancy would sound sweet in any second man's ear: but this speciality is not more characteristic than other and more important qualities of style—the peculiar abruptness, the peculiar inflation, the peculiar crudity—which denote this comedy as apparently if not evidently Marstonian. On the other hand, if it were indeed his, it is impossible to conjecture why his name should have been withheld from the title-page; and it must not be forgotten that even our own day is not more fertile than was Marston's in the generation of that slavish cattle which has always since the age of Horace fed ravenously and thievishly on the pasture-land of every poet who has discovered or reclaimed a field or a province of his own.

But our estimate of John Marston's rank or regiment in the noble army of contemporary poets

will not be in any way affected by acceptance or rejection of any apocryphal addition to the canon of his writings. For better and for worse, the orthodox and undisputed roll of them will suffice to decide that question beyond all chance of intelligent or rational dispute. His rank is high in his own regiment; and the colonel of that regiment is Ben Jonson. At first sight he may seem rather to belong to that brighter and more famous one which has Webster among its captains, Dekker among its lieutenants, Heywood among its privates, and Shakespeare at its head. Nor did he by any means follow the banner of Jonson with such automatic fidelity as that imperious martinet of genius was wont to exact from those who came to be 'sealed of the tribe of Ben.' A rigid critic—a critic who should push rigidity to the verge of injustice—might say that he was one of those recruits in literature whose misfortune it is to fall between two stools—to halt between two courses. It is certain that he never thoroughly mastered either the cavalry drill of Shakespeare or the infantry drill of Jonson. But it is no less certain that the few finest passages which attest the power and the purity of his genius as a poet are above comparison with any such examples of tragic poetry as can be attributed with certainty or with plausibility to the hand which has left us no acknowledged works in

that line except 'Sejanus his Fall' and 'Catiline his Conspiracy.' It is superfluous to add that 'Volpone' was an achievement only less far out of his reach than 'Hamlet.' But this is not to say or to imply that he does not deserve an honourable place among English poets. His savage and unblushing violence or vehemence of satire has no taint of gloating or morbid prurience in the turbid flow of its fitful and furious rhetoric. The restless rage of his invective is as far as human utterance can find itself from the cynical infidelity of an Iago. Of him we may say with more rational confidence what was said of that more potent and more truculent satirist:

> An honest man he is, and hates the slime
> That sticks on filthy deeds.

We may wish that he had not been so much given to trampling and stamping on that slime as to evoke such malodorous exhalations as infect the lower and shallower reaches of the river down which he proceeds to steer us with so strenuous a hand. But it is in a spirit of healthy disgust, not of hankering delight, that he insists on calling the indignant attention of his readers to the baser and fouler elements of natural or social man as displayed in the vicious exuberance or eccentricity of affectation or of self-indulgence. His real interest and his real sympathies are reserved for the purer

and nobler types of womanhood and manhood. In his first extant tragedy, crude and fierce and coarse and awkward as is the general treatment of character and story, the sketch of Mellida is genuinely beautiful in its pathetic and subdued simplicity; though certainly no such tender and gentle figure was ever enchased in a stranger or less attractive setting. There is an odd mixture of care and carelessness in the composition of his plays which is exemplified by the fact that another personage in the first part of the same dramatic poem was announced to reappear in the second part as a more important and elaborate figure; but this second part opens with the appearance of his assassin, red-handed from the murder: and the two parts were published in the same year. And indeed, except in 'Parasitaster' and 'The Dutch Courtesan,' a general defect in his unassisted plays is the headlong confusion of plot, the helterskelter violence of incident, which would hardly have been looked for in the work of a professional and practised hand. 'What you Will' is modestly described as 'a slight-writ play': but slight and slovenly are not the same thing; nor is simplicity the equivalent of incoherence. I have already observed that Marston is apt to be heaviest when he aims at being lightest; not, like Ben Jonson, through a laborious and punctilious excess of conscience

which is unwilling to let slip any chance of effect, to let pass any detail of presentation; but rather, we are tempted to suspect, through a sardonic sense of scorn for the perfunctory task on which his ambitious and impatient hand is for the time employed. Now and then, however—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say once or twice—a gayer note is struck with a lighter touch than usual: as for instance in the excellent parody of Lyly put into the mouth of an idiot in the first scene of the fifth act of the first part of 'Antonio and Mellida.' 'You know, the stone called *lapis*, the nearer it comes to the fire, the hotter it is; and the bird which the geometricians call *avis*, the further it is from the earth, the nearer it is to the heaven; and love, the nigher it is to the flame, the more remote (there's a word, remote!) the more remote it is from the frost.' Shakespeare and Scott have condescended to caricature the style or the manner of the inventor of euphuism: I cannot think their burlesque of his elaborate and sententious triviality so happy, so humorous, or so exact as this. But it is not on his capacity as a satirist or humourist, it is on his occasionally triumphant success as a serious or tragic poet, that the fame of Marston rests assuredly established. His intermittent power to rid himself for awhile of his besetting faults, and to acquire or assume for a

moment the very excellences most incompatible with these, is as extraordinary for the completeness as for the transience of its successful effects. The brief fourth act of 'Antonio and Mellida' is the most astonishing and bewildering production of belated human genius that ever distracted or discomfited a student. Verses more delicately beautiful followed by verses more simply majestic than these have rarely if ever given assurance of eternity to the fame of any but a great master in song.

> Conceit you me: as having clasped a rose
> Within my palm, the rose being ta'en away,
> My hand retains a little breath of sweet,
> So may man's trunk, his spirit slipped away,
> Hold still a faint perfume of his sweet guest.
> 'Tis so: for when discursive powers fly out,
> And roam in progress through the bounds of heaven,
> The soul itself gallops along with them
> As chieftain of this wingèd troop of thought,
> Whilst the dull lodge of spirit standeth waste
> Until the soul return.

Then follows a passage of sheer gibberish; then a dialogue of the noblest and most dramatic eloquence; then a chaotic alternation of sense and nonsense, bad Italian and mixed English, abject farce and dignified rhetoric, spirited simplicity and bombastic jargon. It would be more and less than just to take this act as a sample or a symbol of the author's usual way of work; but I cannot

imagine that a parallel to it, for evil and for good, could be found in the works of any other writer.

The Muse of this poet is no maiden of such pure and august beauty as enthralls us with admiration of Webster's; she has not the gipsy brightness and vagrant charm of Dekker's, her wild soft glances and flashing smiles and fading traces of tears; she is no giddy girl, but a strong woman with fine irregular features, large and luminous eyes, broad intelligent forehead, eyebrows so thick and close together that detraction might call her beetle-browed, powerful mouth and chin, fine contralto voice (with an occasional stammer), expression alternately repellent and attractive, but always striking and sincere. No one has ever found her lovely; but there are times when she has a fascination of her own which fairer and more famous singers might envy her; and the friends she makes are as sure to be constant as she, for all her occasional roughness and coarseness, is sure to be loyal in the main to the nobler instincts of her kind and the loftier traditions of her sisterhood.

THOMAS MIDDLETON

If it be true, as we are told on high authority, that the greatest glory of England is her literature and the greatest glory of English literature is its poetry, it is not less true that the greatest glory of English poetry lies rather in its dramatic than its epic or its lyric triumphs. The name of Shakespeare is above the names even of Milton and Coleridge and Shelley: and the names of his comrades in art and their immediate successors are above all but the highest names in any other province of our song. There is such an overflowing life, such a superb exuberance of abounding and exulting strength, in the dramatic poetry of the half-century extending from 1590 to 1640, that all other epochs of English literature seem as it were but half awake and half alive by comparison with this generation of giants and of gods. There is more sap in this than in any other branch of the national bay-tree: it has an energy in fertility which reminds us rather of the forest than the garden or the park. It is true that the weeds and briars of

the underwood are but too likely to embarrass and offend the feet of the rangers and the gardeners who trim the level flower-plots or preserve the domestic game of enclosed and ordered lowlands in the tamer demesnes of literature. The sun is strong and the wind sharp in the climate which reared the fellows and the followers of Shakespeare. The extreme inequality and roughness of the ground must also be taken into account when we are disposed, as I for one have often been disposed, to wonder beyond measure at the apathetic ignorance of average students in regard of the abundant treasure to be gathered from this wildest and most fruitful province in the poetic empire of England. And yet, since Charles Lamb threw open its gates to all comers in the ninth year of the nineteenth century, it cannot but seem strange that comparatively so few should have availed themselves of the entry to so rich and royal an estate. The subsequent labours of Mr. Dyce made the rough ways plain and the devious paths straight for all serious and worthy students. And now again Mr. Bullen has taken up a task than which none more arduous and important, none worthier of thanks and praise, can be undertaken by an English scholar. In his beautiful and valuable edition of Marlowe there are but two points to which exception may be taken. It was, I think, a fault of

omission to exclude the apocryphal play of 'Lust's Dominion' from a place in the appendix: it was, I am certain, a fault of commission to admit instead of it the much bepuffed and very puffy rubbish of the late Mr. Horne. That clever, versatile, and energetic writer never went so far out of his depth, or floundered so pitifully in such perilous waters, as when he ventured to put verses of his own into the mouth of Christopher Marlowe. These errors we must all hope to see rectified in a second issue of the text: and meantime we can but welcome with all possible gratitude and applause the magnificent series of old plays by unknown writers which we owe to the keen research and the fine appreciation of Marlowe's latest editor. Of these I may find some future occasion to speak: my present business is with the admirable poet who has been promoted to the second place in Mr. Bullen's collection of the English dramatists.

The selection of Middleton for so distinguished a place of honour may probably not approve itself to the judgment of all experts in dramatic literature. Charles Lamb, as they will all remember, would have advised the editor 'to begin with the collected plays of Heywood': which as yet, like the plays of Dekker and of Chapman, remain unedited in any serious or scholarly sense of the term. The existing reprints merely reproduce, without ade-

quate elucidation or correction, the corrupt and chaotic text of the worst early editions: while Middleton has for upwards of half a century enjoyed the privilege denied to men who are usually accounted his equals if not his superiors in poetic if not in dramatic genius. Even for an editor of the ripest learning and the highest ability there is comparatively little to do where Mr. Dyce has been before him in the field. However, we must all give glad and grateful welcome to a new edition of a noble poet who has never yet received his full meed of praise and justice: though our gratitude and our gladness may be quickened and dilated by the proverbial sense of further favours to come.

The first word of modern tribute to the tragic genius of Thomas Middleton was not spoken by Charles Lamb. Four years before the appearance of the priceless volume which established his fame for ever among all true lovers of English poetry by copious excerpts from five of his most characteristic works, Walter Scott, in a note on the fifty-sixth stanza of the second fytte of the metrical romance of 'Sir Tristrem,' had given a passing word of recognition to the 'horribly striking' power of 'some passages' in Middleton's masterpiece: which was first reprinted eleven years later, in the fourth volume of Dilke's Old Plays. Lamb,

surprisingly enough, has given not a single extract from that noble tragedy: it was reserved for Leigh Hunt, when speaking of its author, to remark that 'there is one character of his (De Flores in "The Changeling") which, for effect at once tragical, probable, and poetical, surpasses anything I know of in the drama of domestic life.' The praise is not a whit too high; the truth could not have been better said.

The play with which Mr. Bullen, altering the arrangement adopted by Mr. Dyce, opens his edition of Middleton, is a notable example of the best and the worst qualities which distinguish or disfigure the romantic comedy of the Shakespearean age. The rude and reckless composition, the rough intrusion of savourless farce, the bewildering combinations of incident and the far more bewildering fluctuations of character—all the inconsistencies, incongruities, incoherences of the piece are forgotten when the reader remembers and reverts to the passages of exquisite and fascinating beauty which relieve and redeem the utmost errors of negligence and haste. To find anything more delightful, more satisfying in its pure and simple perfection of loveliness, we must turn to the very best examples of Shakespeare's youthful work. Nay, it must be allowed that in one or two of the master's earliest plays—in 'Two Gentlemen

of Verona,' for instance—we shall find nothing comparable for charm and sincerity of sweet and passionate fancy with such enchanting verses as these.

O happy persecution, I embrace thee
With an unfettered soul! So sweet a thing
It is to sigh upon the rack of love,
Where each calamity is groaning witness
Of the poor martyr's faith. I never heard
Of any true affection, but 'twas nipt
With care, that, like the caterpillar, eats
The leaves off the spring's sweetest book, the rose.
Love, bred on earth, is often nursed in hell:
By rote it reads woe, ere it learn to spell.

Again: the 'secure tyrant, but unhappy lover,' whose prisoner and rival has thus expressed his triumphant resignation, is counselled by his friend to 'go laugh and lie down,' as not having slept for three nights; but answers, in words even more delicious than his supplanter's;

Alas, how can I? he that truly loves
Burns out the day in idle fantasies;
And when the lamb bleating doth bid good night
Unto the closing day, then tears begin
To keep quick time unto the owl, whose voice
Shrieks like the bellman in the lover's ears:
Love's eye the jewel of sleep, O, seldom wears!
The early lark is wakened from her bed,
Being only by love's plaints disquieted;
And, singing in the morning's ear, she weeps,
Being deep in love, at lovers' broken sleeps:

> But say a golden slumber chance to tie
> With silken strings the cover of love's eye,
> Then dreams, magician-like, mocking present
> Pleasures, whose fading leaves more discontent.

Perfect in music, faultless in feeling, exquisite in refined simplicity of expression, this passage is hardly more beautiful and noble than one or two in the play which follows. 'The Phœnix' is a quaint and homely compound of satirical realism in social studies with utopian invention in the figure of an ideal prince, himself a compound of Harun al-Rashid and 'Albert the Good,' who wanders through the play as a detective in disguise, and appears in his own person at the close to discharge in full the general and particular claims of justice and philanthropy. The whole work is slight and sketchy, primitive if not puerile in parts, but easy and amusing to read; the confidence reposed by the worthy monarch in noblemen of such unequivocal nomenclature as Lord Proditor, Lussurioso, and Infesto, is one of the signs that we are here still on the debatable borderland between the old Morality and the new Comedy—a province where incarnate vices and virtues are seen figuring and posturing in what can scarcely be called masquerade. But the two fine soliloquies of Phœnix on the corruption of the purity of law (Act i. scene iv.) and the profanation

of the sanctity of marriage (Act ii. scene ii.) are somewhat riper and graver in style, with less admixture of rhyme and more variety of cadence, than the lovely verses above quoted. Milton's obligation to the latter passage is less direct than his earlier obligation to a later play of Middleton's, from which he transferred one of the most beautiful as well as most famous images in 'Lycidas': but his early and intimate acquaintance with Middleton had apparently (as Mr. Dyce seems to think [1]) left in the ear of the blind old poet a more or less distinct echo from the noble opening verses of the dramatist's address to 'reverend and honourable matrimony.'

In 'Michaelmas Term' the realism of Middleton's comic style is no longer alloyed or flavoured with poetry or fancy. It is an excellent Hogarthian comedy, full of rapid and vivid incident, of

[1] Mr. Dyce would no doubt have altered his opinion had he lived to see the evidence adduced by the Director of the New Meltun Society that the real author of *A Game at Chess* was none other than John Milton himself: whose earliest poems had appeared the year before the publication of that anti-papal satire. This discovery is only less curious and precious than a later revelation which we must accept on the same authority, that *Comus* was written by Sir John Suckling, *Paradise Regained* by Lord Rochester, and *Samson Agonistes* by Elkanah Settle: while on the other hand it may be affirmed with no less confidence that Milton—who never would allow his name to be spelt right on the title-page or under the dedication of any work published by him—owed his immunity from punishment after the Restoration to the admitted fact that he was the real author of Dryden's *Astræa Redux*.

pleasant or indignant humour. Its successor, 'A Trick to catch the Old One,' is by far the best play Middleton had yet written, and one of the best he ever wrote. The merit of this and his other good comedies does not indeed consist in any new or subtle study of character, any Shakespearean creation or Jonsonian invention of humours or of men: the spendthrifts and the misers, the courtesans and the dotards, are figures borrowed from the common stock of stage tradition: it is the vivid variety of incident and intrigue, the freshness and ease and vigour of the style, the clear straightforward energy and vivacity of the action, that the reader finds most praiseworthy in the best comic work of such ready writers as Middleton and Dekker. The dialogue has sometimes touches of real humour and flashes of genuine wit: but its readable and enjoyable quality is generally independent of these. Very witty writing may be very dreary reading, for want of natural animation and true dramatic movement: and in these qualities at least the rough and ready work of our old dramatists is seldom if ever deficient.

It is, however, but too probable that the reader's enjoyment may be crossed with a dash of exasperation when he finds a writer of real genius so reckless of fame and self-respect as the pressure

of want or the weariness of overwork seems but too often and too naturally to have made too many of the great dramatic journeymen whose powers were half wasted or half worn out in the struggle for bare bread. No other excuse than this can be advanced for the demerit of Middleton's next comedy. Had the author wished to show how well and how ill he could write at his worst and at his best, he could have given no fairer proof than by the publication of two plays issued under his name in the same year 1608. 'The Family of Love' is in my judgment unquestionably and incomparably the worst of Middleton's plays: very coarse, very dull, altogether distasteful and ineffectual. As a religious satire it is so utterly pointless as to leave no impression of any definite folly or distinctive knavery in the doctrine or the practice of the particular sect held up by name to ridicule: an obscure body of feather-headed fanatics, concerning whom we can only be certain that they were decent and inoffensive in comparison with the yelling Yahoos whom the scandalous and senseless license of our own day allows to run and roar about the country unmuzzled and unwhipped.

There is much more merit in the broad comedy of 'Your Five Gallants,' a curious burlesque study of manners and morals not generally commendable

for imitation. The ingenious and humorous invention which supplies a centre for the picture and a pivot for the action is most singularly identical with the device of a modern detective as recorded by the greatest English writer of his day. 'The Butcher's Story,' told to Dickens by the policeman who had played the part of the innocent young butcher, may be profitably compared by lovers of detective humour with the story of Fitsgrave—a 'thrice worthy' gentleman who under the disguise of a young gull fresh from college succeeds in circumventing and unmasking the five associated swindlers of variously villainous professions by whom a fair and amiable heiress is beleaguered and befooled. The play is somewhat crude and hasty in construction, but full of life and fun and grotesque variety of humorous event.

The first of Middleton's plays to attract notice from students of a later generation, 'A Mad World, my Masters,' if not quite so thoroughly good a comedy as 'A Trick to Catch the Old One,' must be allowed to contain the very best comic character ever drawn or sketched by the fertile and flowing pen of its author. The prodigal grandfather, Sir Bounteous Progress, is perhaps the most lifelike figure of a good-humoured and liberal old libertine that ever amused or scandalised a tolerant or intolerant reader. The chief

incidents of the action are admirably humorous and ingenious; but the matrimonial part of the catastrophe is something more than repulsive, and the singular intervention of a real live succubus, less terrible in her seductions than her sister of the 'Contes Drolatiques,' can hardly seem happy or seasonable to a generation which knows not King James and his Demonology.

Of the two poets occasionally associated with Middleton in the composition of a play, Dekker seems usually to have taken in hand the greater part, and Rowley the lesser part, of the composite poem engendered by their joint efforts. The style of 'The Roaring Girl' is full of Dekker's peculiar mannerisms; slipshod and straggling metre, incongruous touches or flashes of fanciful or lyrical expression, reckless and awkward inversions, irrational and irrepressible outbreaks of irregular and fitful rhyme. And with all these faults it is more unmistakably the style of a born poet than is the usual style of Middleton. Dekker would have taken a high place among the finest if not among the greatest of English poets if he had but had the sense of form—the instinct of composition. Whether it was modesty, indolence, indifference, or incompetence, some drawback or shortcoming there was which so far impaired the quality of his strong and delicate genius that it is impossible for

his most ardent and cordial admirer to say or think of his very best work that it really does him justice—that it adequately represents the fullness of his unquestionable powers. And yet it is certain that Lamb was not less right than usual when he said that Dekker 'had poetry enough for anything.' But he had not constructive power enough for the trade of a playwright—the trade in which he spent so many weary years of ill-requited labour. This comedy in which we first find him associated with Middleton is well written and well contrived, and fairly diverting—especially to an idle or an uncritical reader: though even such an one may suspect that the heroine here represented as a virginal virago must have been in fact rather like Dr. Johnson's fair friend Bet Flint; of whom the Great Lexicographer 'used to say that she was generally slut and drunkard; occasionally whore and thief' (Boswell, May 8, 1781). The parallel would have been more nearly complete if Moll Cutpurse 'had written her own Life in verse,' and brought it to Selden or Bishop Hall with a request that he would furnish her with a preface to it.

The plays of Middleton are not so properly divisible into tragic and comic as into realistic and romantic—into plays of which the mainspring is essentially prosaic or photographic, and plays of

which the mainspring is principally fanciful or poetical. Two only of the former class remain to be mentioned: 'Anything for a Quiet Life' and 'A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.' There is very good stuff in the plot or groundwork of the former, but the workmanship is hardly worthy of the material. Mr. Bullen ingeniously and plausibly suggests the partnership of Shirley in this play: but the conception of the character in which he discerns a likeness to the touch of the lesser dramatist is happier and more original than such a comparison would indicate. The young step-mother whose affectation of selfish levity and grasping craft is really designed to cure her husband of his infatuation, and to reconcile him with the son who regards her as his worst enemy, is a figure equally novel, effective, and attractive. The honest shopkeeper and his shrewish wife may remind us again of Dickens by their points of likeness to Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby; though the reformation of the mercer's jealous vixen is brought about by more humorous and less tragical means than the repentance of the law-stationer's 'little woman.' George the apprentice, through whose wit and energy this happy consummation becomes possible, is a very original and amusing example of the young Londoner of the period. But there is more humour, though very little

chastity, in the 'Chaste Maid'; a play of quite exceptional freedom and audacity, and certainly one of the drollest and liveliest that ever broke the bounds of propriety or shook the sides of merriment.

The opening of 'More Dissemblers besides Women' is as full at once of comic and of romantic promise as the upshot of the whole is unsatisfactory—a most lame and impotent conclusion. But some of the dialogue is exquisite; full of flowing music and gentle grace, of ease and softness and fancy and spirit; and the part of a poetic or romantic Joseph Surface, as perfect in the praise of virtue as in the practice of vice, is one of Middleton's really fine and happy inventions. In the style of 'The Widow' there is no less fluency and facility: it is throughout identical with that of Middleton's other comedies in metre; a style which has so many points in common with Fletcher's as to make the apocryphal attribution of a share in this comedy to the hand of the greater poet more plausible than many other ascriptions of the kind. I am inclined nevertheless to agree with Mr. Bullen's apparent opinion that the whole credit of this brilliant play may be reasonably assigned to Middleton; and especially with his remark that the only scene in which any resemblance to the manner of Ben

Jonson can be traced by the most determined ingenuity of critical research is more like the work of a pupil than like a hasty sketch of the master's. There is no lack of energetic invention and beautiful versification in another comedy of adventure and intrigue, 'No Wit, no Help like a Woman's': the unpleasant or extravagant quality of certain incidents in the story is partially neutralised or modified by the unfailing charm of a style worthy of Fletcher himself in his ripest and sweetest stage of poetic comedy.

But high above all the works yet mentioned there stands and will stand conspicuous while noble emotion and noble verse have honour among English readers the pathetic and heroic play so memorably appreciated by Charles Lamb, 'A Fair Quarrel.' It would be the vainest and emptiest impertinence to offer a word in echo of his priceless and imperishable praise. The delicate nobility of the central conception on which the hero's character depends for its full relief and development should be enough to efface all remembrance of any defect or default in moral taste, any shortcoming on the æsthetic side of ethics, which may be detected in any slighter or hastier example of the poet's invention. A man must be dull and slow of sympathies indeed who cannot respond in spirit to that bitter cry of chivalrous and manful

agony at sense of the shadow of a mother's shame:—

> Quench, my spirit,
> And out with honour's flaming lights within thee!
> Be dark and dead to all respects of manhood!
> I never shall have use of valour more.

Middleton has no second hero like Captain Ager: but where is there another so thoroughly noble and lovable among all the characters of all the dramatists of his time but Shakespeare?

The part taken by Rowley in this play is easy for any tiro in criticism to verify. The rough and crude genius of that perverse and powerful writer is not seen here by any means at its best. I should say that his call was rather towards tragedy than towards comedy; that his mastery of severe and serious emotion was more genuine and more natural than his command of satirical or grotesque realism. The tragedy in which he has grappled with the subject afterwards so differently handled in the first and greatest of Landor's tragedies is to me of far more interest and value than such comedies as that which kindled the enthusiasm of a loyal Londoner in the civic sympathies of Lamb. Disfigured as it is towards the close by indulgence in mere horror and brutality after the fashion of Andronicus or Jeronimo, it has more beauty and power and pathos in its best scenes than a reader

of his comedies would have expected. But in the underplot of 'A Fair Quarrel' Rowley's besetting faults of coarseness and quaintness, stiffness and roughness, are so flagrant and obtrusive that we cannot avoid a feeling of regret and irritation at such untimely and inharmonious evidence of his partnership with a poet of finer if not of sturdier genius. The same sense of discord and inequality will be aroused on comparison of the worse with the better parts of 'The Old Law.' The clumsiness and dullness of the farcical interludes can hardly be paralleled in the rudest and hastiest scenes of Middleton's writing: while the sweet and noble dignity of the finer passages have the stamp of his ripest and tenderest genius on every line and in every cadence. But for sheer bewildering incongruity there is no play known to me which can be compared with 'The Mayor of Queenborough.' Here again we find a note so dissonant and discordant in the lighter parts of the dramatic concert that we seem at once to recognise the harsher and hoarser instrument of Rowley. The farce is even more extravagantly and preposterously mistimed and misplaced than that which disfigures the play just mentioned: but I thoroughly agree with Mr. Bullen's high estimate of the power displayed and maintained throughout the tragic and poetic part of this drama; to which no

previous critic has ever vouchsafed a word of due acknowledgment. The story is ugly and unnatural, but its repulsive effect is transfigured or neutralised by the charm of tender or passionate poetry; and it must be admitted that the hideous villainy of Vortiger and Horsus affords an opening for subsequent scenic effects of striking and genuine tragical interest.

The difference between the genius of Middleton and the genius of Dekker could not be better illustrated than by comparison of their attempts at political and patriotic allegory. The lazy, slovenly, impatient genius of Dekker flashes out by fits and starts on the reader of the play in which he has expressed his English hatred of Spain and Popery, his English pride in the rout of the Armada, and his English gratitude for the part played by Queen Elizabeth in the crowning struggle of the time: but his most cordial admirer can hardly consider 'The Whore of Babylon' a shining or satisfactory example of dramatic art. The play which brought Middleton into prison, and earned for the actors a sum so far beyond parallel as to have seemed incredible till the fullest evidence was procured, is one of the most complete and exquisite works of artistic ingenuity and dexterity that ever excited or offended, enraptured or scandalised an audience of friends or enemies: the only work of English

poetry which may properly be called Aristophanic. It has the same depth of civic seriousness, the same earnest ardour and devotion to the old cause of the old country, the same solid fervour of enthusiasm and indignation, which animated the third great poet of Athens against the corruption of art by the sophistry of Euripides and the corruption of manhood by the sophistry of Socrates. The delicate skill of the workmanship can only be appreciated by careful and thorough study; but that the infusion of poetic fancy and feeling into the generally comic and satiric style is hardly unworthy of the comparison which I have ventured to challenge, I will take but one brief extract for evidence.

> Upon those lips, the sweet fresh buds of youth,
> The holy dew of prayer lies, like pearl
> Dropt from the opening eyelids of the morn
> Upon a bashful rose.

Here for once even 'that celestial thief' John Milton has impaired rather than improved the effect of the beautiful phrase borrowed from an earlier and inferior poet. His use of Middleton's exquisite image is not quite so apt—so perfectly picturesque and harmonious—as the use to which it was put by the inventor.

Nothing in the age of Shakespeare is so difficult for an Englishman of our own age to realise

as the temper, the intelligence, the serious and refined elevation of an audience which was at once capable of enjoying and applauding the roughest and coarsest kinds of pleasantry, the rudest and crudest scenes of violence, and competent to appreciate the finest and the highest reaches of poetry, the subtlest and the most sustained allusions of ethical or political symbolism. The large and long popularity of an exquisite dramatic or academic allegory such as 'Lingua,' which would seem to appeal only to readers of exceptional education, exceptional delicacy of perception, and exceptional quickness of wit, is hardly more remarkable than the popular success of a play requiring such keen constancy of attention, such vivid wakefulness and promptitude of apprehension, as this even more serious than fantastic work of Middleton's. The vulgarity and puerility of all modern attempts at any comparable effect need not be cited to throw into relief the essential finish, the impassioned intelligence the high spiritual and literary level, of these crowded and brilliant and vehement five acts. Their extreme cleverness, their indefatigable ingenuity, would in any case have been remarkable: but their fullness of active and poetic life gives them an interest far deeper and higher and more permanent than the mere sense of curiosity and wonder.

But if 'A Game at Chess' is especially distinguished by its complete and thorough harmony of execution and design, the lack of any such artistic merit in another famous work of Middleton's is such as once more to excite that irritating sense of inequality, irregularity, inconstancy of genius and inconsequence of aim, which too often besets and bewilders the student of our early dramatists. There is poetry enough in 'The Witch' to furnish forth a whole generation of poeticules: but the construction or composition of the play, the arrangement and evolution of event, the distinction or development of character, would do less than little credit to a boy of twelve; who at any rate would hardly have thought of patching up so ridiculous a reconciliation between intending murderers and intended victims as here exceeds in absurdity the chaotic combination of accident and error which disposes of inconvenient or superfluous underlings. But though neither Mr. Dyce nor Mr. Bullen has been at all excessive or unjust in his animadversions on these flagrant faults and follies, neither editor has given his author due credit for the excellence of style, of language and versification, which makes this play readable throughout with pleasure, if not always without impatience. Fletcher himself, the acknowledged master of the style here adopted by Middleton,

has left no finer example of metrical fluency and melodious ease. The fashion of dialogue and composition is no doubt rather feminine than masculine: Marlowe and Jonson, Webster and Beaumont, Tourneur and Ford,—to cite none but the greatest of authorities in this kind—wrote a firmer if not a freer hand, struck a graver if not a sweeter note of verse: this rapid effluence of easy expression is liable to lapse into conventional efflux of facile improvisation: but such command of it as Middleton's is impossible to any but a genuine and a memorable poet.

As for the supposed obligations of Shakespeare to Middleton or Middleton to Shakespeare, the imaginary relations of 'The Witch' to 'Macbeth' or 'Macbeth' to 'The Witch,' I can only say that the investigation of this subject seems to me as profitable as a research into the natural history of snakes in Iceland. That the editors to whom we owe the miserably defaced and villainously garbled text which is all that has reached us of 'Macbeth,' not content with the mutilation of the greater poet, had recourse to the interpolation of a few superfluous and incongruous lines or fragments from the lyric portions of the lesser poet's work—that the players who mangled Shakespeare were the pilferers who plundered Middleton—must be obvious to all but those (if any such yet exist

anywhere) who are capable of believing the unspeakably impudent assertion of those mendacious malefactors that they have left us a pure and perfect edition of Shakespeare. These passages are all thoroughly in keeping with the general tone of the lesser work: it would be tautology to add that they are no less utterly out of keeping with the general tone of the other. But in their own way nothing can be finer: they have a tragic liveliness in ghastliness, a grotesque animation of horror, which no other poet has ever conceived or conveyed to us. The difference between Michel Angelo and Goya, Tintoretto and Gustave Doré, does not quite efface the right of the minor artists to existence and remembrance.

The strange and strangely beautiful tragic poem, which could not have come down to us under a stupider or a less appropriate name than that apparently conferred on it by the licenser of 'The Second Maiden's Tragedy,' must by all evidence of internal and external probability be almost unquestionably assigned to the hand of Middleton. The masterly daring of the stage effect, which cannot or should not be mistaken for the merely theatrical audacity of a headlong impressionist at any price, is not more characteristic of the author than the tender and passionate fluency of the flawless verse. The rather eccen-

tric intermittency of the supernatural action is a no less obviously plausible reason for assigning it to the creator of so realistic a witch and so singular a succubus. But such a dramatic poem as this would be a conspicuous jewel in the crown of any but a supremely great dramatist and poet. And the musical or metrical harmony of the verse, imperceptible as it may be or rather must always be to the long-eared dunces who can only think to hear through their clumsy fingers, is so like Fletcher's as to suggest that if any part of Shakespeare's 'King Henry VIII.' is attributable to a lesser hand than his it may far more plausibly be assigned to Middleton's than to Fletcher's. Had it or could it have been the work of Fletcher, the clamorous and multitudinous satellites who preferred him with such furious fatuity of acclamation to so inconsiderable a rival as Shakespeare would hardly have abstained from reclaiming it on behalf of the great poet whom it pleased their imbecility to set so far above one so immeasurably and so unutterably greater.

The tragedy of 'Women beware Women,' whether or not it be accepted as the masterpiece of Middleton, is at least an excellent example of the facility and fluency and equable promptitude of style which all students will duly appreciate and applaud in the riper and completer work of

this admirable poet. It is full to overflowing of noble eloquence, of inventive resource and suggestive effect, of rhetorical affluence and theatrical ability. The opening or exposition of the play is quite masterly: and the scene in which the forsaken husband is seduced into consolation by the temptress of his wife is worthy of all praise for the straightforward ingenuity and the serious delicacy by which the action is rendered credible and the situation endurable. But I fear that few or none will be found to disagree with my opinion that no such approbation or tolerance can be reasonably extended so as to cover or condone the offences of either the underplot or the upshot of the play. The one is repulsive beyond redemption by elegance of style, the other is preposterous beyond extenuation on the score of logical or poetical justice. Those who object on principle to solution by massacre must object in consistency to the conclusions of 'Hamlet' and 'King Lear': nor are the results of Webster's tragic invention more questionable or less inevitable than the results of Shakespeare's: but the dragnet of murder which gathers in the characters at the close of this play is as promiscuous in its sweep as that cast by Cyril Tourneur over the internecine shoal of sharks who are hauled in and ripped open at the close of 'The Revenger's Tragedy.' Had Middleton been

content with the admirable subject of his main action, he might have given us a simple and unimpeachable masterpiece: and even as it is he has left us a noble and memorable work. It is true that the irredeemable infamy of the leading characters degrades and deforms the nature of the interest excited: the good and gentle old mother whose affectionate simplicity is so gracefully and attractively painted passes out of the story and drops out of the list of actors just when some redeeming figure is most needed to assuage the dreariness of disgust with which we follow the fortunes of so meanly criminal a crew: and the splendid eloquence of the only other respectable person in the play is not of itself sufficient to make a living figure, rather than the mere mouthpiece for indignant emotion, of so subordinate and inactive a character as the Cardinal. The lower comedy of the play is identical in motive with that which defaces the master-work of Ford: more stupid and offensive it hardly could be. But the high comedy of the scene between Livia and the Widow is as fine as the best work in that kind left us by the best poets and humourists of the Shakespearean age; it is not indeed unworthy of the comparison with Chaucer's which it suggested to the all but impeccable judgment of Charles Lamb.

The lack of moral interest and sympathetic attraction in the characters and the story, which has been noted as the principal defect in the otherwise effective composition of 'Women beware Women,' is an objection which cannot be brought against the graceful tragicomedy of 'The Spanish Gipsy.' Whatever is best in the tragic or in the romantic part of this play bears the stamp of Middleton's genius alike in the sentiment and the style. 'The code of modern morals,' to borrow a convenient phrase from Shelley, may hardly incline us to accept as plausible or as possible the repentance and the redemption of so brutal a ruffian as Roderigo: but the vivid beauty of the dialogue is equal to the vivid interest of the situation which makes the first act one of the most striking in any play of the time. The double action has some leading points in common with two of Fletcher's, which have nothing in common with each other: Merione in 'The Queen of Corinth' is less interesting than Clara, but the vagabonds of 'Beggars' Bush' are more amusing than Rowley's or Middleton's. The play is somewhat deficient in firmness or solidity of construction: it is, if such a phrase be permissible, one of those half-baked or underdone dishes of various and confused ingredients, in which the cook's or the baker's hurry has impaired the excellent materials of

wholesome bread and savoury meat. The splendid slovens who served their audience with spiritual work in which the gods had mixed 'so much of earth, so much of heaven, and such impetuous blood'—the generous and headlong purveyors who lavished on their daily provision of dramatic fare such wealth of fine material and such prodigality of superfluous grace—the foremost followers of Marlowe and of Shakespeare were too prone to follow the impetuous example of the first rather than the severe example of the second. There is perhaps not one of them—and Middleton assuredly is not one—whom we can reasonably imagine capable of the patience and self-respect which induced Shakespeare to rewrite the triumphantly popular parts of Romeo, of Falstaff, and of Hamlet, with an eye to the literary perfection and permanence of work which in its first light outline had won the crowning suffrage of immediate or spectacular applause.

The rough and ready hand of Rowley may be traced, not indeed in the more high-toned passages, but in many of the most animated scenes of 'The Spanish Gipsy.' In the most remarkable of the ten masques or interludes which appear among the collected works of Middleton the two names are again associated. To the freshness, liveliness, and spirited ingenuity of this little allegorical

comedy Mr. Bullen has done ample justice in his excellent critical introduction. 'The Inner-Temple Masque,' less elaborate than 'The World Tost at Tennis,' shows no lack of homely humour and invention: and in the others there is as much waste of fine flowing verse and facile fancy as ever excited the rational regret of a modern reader at the reckless profusion of literary power which the great poets of the time were content to lavish on the decoration or exposition of an ephemeral pageant. Of Middleton's other minor works, apocryphal or genuine, I will only say that his authorship of 'Microcynicon'—a dull and crabbed imitation of Marston's worst work as a satirist—seems to me utterly incredible. A lucid and melodious fluency of style is the mark of all his metrical writing: and this stupid piece of obscure and clumsy jargon could have been the work of no man endowed with more faculty of expression than informs or modulates the whine of an average pig. Nor is it rationally conceivable that the Thomas Middleton who soiled some reams of paper with what he was pleased to consider or to call a paraphrase of the 'Wisdom of Solomon' can have had anything but a poet's name in common with a poet. This name is not like that of the great writer whose name is attached to 'The Transformed Metamorphosis': there can hardly have

been two Cyril Tourneurs in the field, but there may well have been half a dozen Thomas Middletons. And Tourneur's abortive attempt at allegoric discourse is but a preposterous freak of prolonged eccentricity: this paraphrase is simply a tideless and interminable sea of limitless and inexhaustible drivel. There are three reasons—two of them considerable, but the third conclusive—for assigning to Middleton the two satirical tracts in the style of Nash, or rather of Dekker, which appeared in the same year with his initials subscribed to their prefatory addresses. Mr. Dyce thought they were written by the poet whose ready verse and realistic humour are both well represented in their text: Mr. Bullen agrees with Mr. Dyce in thinking that they are the work of Middleton. And Mr. Carew Hazlitt thinks that they are not.

No such absolute and final evidence as this can be adduced in favour or disfavour of the theory which would saddle the reputation of Middleton with the authorship of a dull and disjointed comedy, the work (it has hitherto been supposed) of the German substitute for Shakespeare. Middleton has no doubt left us more crude and shapeless plays than 'The Puritan'; none, in my opinion,—excepting always his very worst authentic example of farce or satire, 'The Family of Love'—so

heavy and so empty and so feeble. If it must be assigned to any author of higher rank than the new Shakspere, I would suggest that it is much more like Rowley's than like Middleton's worst work. Of the best qualities which distinguish either of these writers as poet or as humourist, it has not the shadow or the glimmer of a vestige.

In the last and the greatest work which bears their united names—a work which should suffice to make either name immortal if immortality were other than an accidental attribute of genius—the very highest capacity of either poet is seen at its very best. There is more of mere poetry, more splendour of style and vehemence of verbal inspiration, in the work of other poets then writing for the stage: the two masterpieces of Webster are higher in tone at their highest, more imaginative and more fascinating in their expression of terrible or of piteous truth: there are more superb harmonies, more glorious raptures of ardent and eloquent music, in the sometimes unsurpassed and unsurpassable poetic passion of Cyril Tourneur. But even Webster's men seem but splendid sketches, as Tourneur's seem but shadowy or fiery outlines, beside the perfect and living figure of De Flores. The man is so horribly human, so fearfully and wonderfully natural, in his single-hearted brutality of devotion, his absolute absorp-

tion of soul and body by one consuming force of passionately cynical desire, that we must go to Shakespeare for an equally original and an equally unquestionable revelation of indubitable truth. And in no play by Beaumont and Fletcher is the concord between the two partners more singularly complete in unity of spirit and of style than throughout the tragic part of this play. The underplot from which it most unluckily and absurdly derives its title is very stupid, rather coarse, and almost vulgar: but the two great parts of Beatrice and De Flores are equally consistent, coherent and sustained, in the scenes obviously written by Middleton and in the scenes obviously written by Rowley. The subordinate part taken by Middleton in Dekker's play of 'The Honest Whore' is difficult to discern from the context or to verify by inner evidence: though some likeness to his realistic or photographic method may be admitted as perceptible in the admirable picture of Bellafront's morning reception at the opening of the second act of the first part. But here we may assert with fair confidence that the first and the last scenes of the play bear the indisputable sign-manual of William Rowley. His vigorous and vivid genius, his somewhat hard and curt directness of style and manner, his clear and trenchant power of straightforward presentation or exposi-

tion, may be traced in every line as plainly as the hand of Middleton must be recognised in the main part of the tragic action intervening. To Rowley therefore must be assigned the very high credit of introducing and of dismissing with adequate and even triumphant effect the strangely original tragic figure which owes its fullest and finest development to the genius of Middleton. To both poets alike must unqualified and equal praise be given for the subtle simplicity of skill with which they make us appreciate the fatal and foreordained affinity between the ill-favoured, rough-mannered, broken-down gentleman, and the headstrong unscrupulous unobservant girl whose very abhorrence of him serves only to fling her down from her high station of haughty beauty into the very clutch of his ravenous and pitiless passion. Her cry of horror and astonishment at first perception of the price to be paid for a service she had thought to purchase with mere money is so wonderfully real in its artless and ingenuous sincerity that Shakespeare himself could hardly have bettered it:

> Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked,
> And shelter such a cunning cruelty,
> To make his death the murderer of my honour!

That note of incredulous amazement that the man whom she has just instigated to the commission of murder 'can be so wicked' as to have

served her ends for any end of his own beyond the pay of a professional assassin is a touch worthy of the greatest dramatist that ever lived. The perfect simplicity of expression is as notable as the perfect innocence of her surprise; the candid astonishment of a nature absolutely incapable of seeing more than one thing or holding more than one thought at a time. That she, the first criminal, should be honestly shocked as well as physically horrified by revelation of the real motive which impelled her accomplice into crime, gives a lurid streak of tragic humour to the lifelike interest of the scene; as the pure infusion of spontaneous poetry throughout redeems the whole work from the charge of vulgar subservience to a vulgar taste for the presentation or the contemplation of criminal horror. Instances of this happy and natural nobility of instinct abound in the casual expressions which give grace and animation always, but never any touch of rhetorical transgression or florid superfluity, to the brief and trenchant swordplay of the tragic dialogue.

> That sigh would fain have utterance: take pity on't,
> And lend it a free word; 'las, how it labours
> For liberty! I hear the murmur yet
> Beat at your bosom.

The wording of this passage is sufficient to attest the presence and approve the quality of a

poet: the manner and the moment of its introduction would be enough to show the instinctive and inborn insight of a natural dramatist. As much may be said of the few words which give us a ghostly glimpse of supernatural terror :—

> Ha! what art thou that tak'st away the light
> Betwixt that star and me? I dread thee not:
> 'Twas but a mist of conscience.

But the real power and genius of the work cannot be shown by extracts—not even by such extracts as these. His friend and colleague Dekker shows to better advantage by the process of selection: hardly one of his plays leaves so strong and sweet an impression of its general and complete excellence as of separate scenes or passages of tender and delicate imagination or emotion beyond the reach of Middleton: but the tragic unity and completeness of conception which distinguish this masterpiece will be sought in vain among the less firm and solid figures of his less serious and profound invention. Had 'The Changeling' not been preserved, we should not have known Middleton: as it is, we are more than justified in asserting that a critic who denies him a high place among the poets of England must be not merely ignorant of the qualities which involve a right or confer a claim to this position, but incapable of curing his ignorance by any process of study. The rough

and rapid work which absorbed too much of this poet's time and toil seems almost incongruous with the impression made by the noble and thoughtful face, so full of gentle dignity and earnest composure, in which we recognise the graver and loftier genius of a man worthy to hold his own beside all but the greatest of his age. And that age was the age of Shakespeare.

WILLIAM ROWLEY

Of all the poets and humourists who lit up the London stage for half a century of unequalled glory, William Rowley was the most thoroughly loyal Londoner: the most evidently and proudly mindful that he was a citizen of no mean city. I have always thought that this must have been the conscious or unconscious source of the strong and profound interest which his very remarkable and original genius had the good fortune to evoke from the sympathies of Charles Lamb. That divine cockney, if the word may be used—and 'why in the name of Glory,' to borrow the phrase of another immortal fellow-townsman, should it not be?—as a term of no less honour than Yorkshireman or Northumbrian, Cornishman or Welshman, has lavished upon Rowley such cordial and such manfully sympathetic praise as would suffice to preserve and to immortalize the name of a far lesser man and a far feebler workman in tragedy or comedy, poetry or prose.

If Lamb had known and read the first work published by Rowley, it is impossible to imagine that it would not have been honoured by the tribute of some passing and priceless word. Why it has never been reissued (except in a private reprint for the Percy Society) among the many less deserving and less interesting revivals from the apparently and not really ephemeral literature of its day would be to me an insoluble problem, if I were so ignorant as never to have realised the too obvious fact that chance, pure and simple chance, guides or misguides the intelligence, and suggests or fails to suggest the duty, of scholars and of students who have given time and thought to such far from unimportant or insignificant matters. 'A Search for Money, or a Quest for the Wandering Knight Monsieur L'Argent,' is not comparable with the best pamphlets of Nash or of Dekker: a competent reader of those admirable improvisations will at the first opening feel inclined to regard it as a feeble and servile imitation of their quaint and obsolescent manner; but he will soon find an original and a vigorous vein of native humour in their comrade or their disciple. The seekers after the wandering knight, baffled in their search on shore, are compelled to recognise the sad fact that 'the sea is lunatic, and mad folks keep no money, he would sink if he

were there.' The description of an usurer is memorable by its reference to the first great poet of England, among whose followers Rowley is far from the least worthy of honour. 'His visage (or vizard) like the artificial Jew of Malta's nose' brings before the reader in vivid realism the likeness of Alleyn or Burbage as he represented in grotesque and tragic disguise the magnificent figure of Marlowe's creative invention or discovery by dint of genius. (I do not remember the curious verb 'to rand' except in this little book: 'he randed out these sentences': I presume it to be the first form of 'rant.') The account of St. Paul's in 1609 is very curious and scandalous: 'the very Temple itself (in bare humility) stood without his cap, and so had stood many years, many good folks had spoke for him because he could not speak for himself, and somewhat had been gathered in his behalf, but not half enough to supply his necessity.'

When we pass from 'the Temple' to Westminster Hall we come upon a sample of humour which would be famous if it were the gift of a less ungratefully forgotten hand.

'Here were two brothers at buffets with angels in their fists about the thatch that blew off his house into the other's garden and so spoiled a Hartichoke.'

It should not have been left to a later hand—it should surely have been the privilege of Lamb's or Hazlitt's, and perhaps rather Hazlitt's than even Lamb's—to unearth and to transcribe the quaint and spirited description of Thames watermen 'howling, hollowing, and calling for passengers, as if all the hags in hell had been imprisoned, and begging at the grate, fiends and furies that (God be thanked) could vex the soul but not torment it, yet indeed their most power was over the body, for here an audacious mouthing - randing - impudent - scullery - wastecoat - and-bodied rascal would have hail'd a penny from us for his scullership.'

Could Rabelais himself have described them better, or with vigour of humorous expression more heartily and enjoyably characteristic of his own all but incomparable genius?

The good old times, as remote in Shakespeare's day as in our own, were never more delightfully described than by Rowley in this noble and simple phrase: 'Then was England's whole year but a St. George's day.'

Webster wished that what he wrote might be read by the light of Shakespeare: an admirer of Rowley might hope and must wish that he should be read by the light of Lamb. His comedies have real as well as realistic merit: not equal to

that of Dekker's or Middleton's at their best, but usually not far inferior to Heywood's or to theirs. The first of them, 'A New Wonder: A Woman Never Vext,' has received such immortal honour from the loving hand of Lamb that perhaps the one right thing to say of it would be an adaptation of a Catholic formula—'Agnus locutus est: causa finita est.' The realism is so thorough as to make the interest something more than historical: and historically it is so valuable as well as amusing that a reasonable student may overlook the offensive 'mingle-mangle' of prose and verse which cannot but painfully affect the nerves of all not congenitally insensitive readers, as it surely must have ground and grated on the ears of an audience accustomed to enjoy the prose as well as the verse of Shakespeare and his kind. No graver offence can be committed or conceived by a writer with any claim to any but contemptuous remembrance than this debasement of the currency of verse.

The character of Robert Foster is so noble and attractive in its selfless and manful simplicity that it gives us and leaves with us a more cordial sense of sympathetic regard and respect for his creator than we could feel if this gallant and homely figure were withdrawn from the stage of his invention. The female Polycrates who suffers under the curse of inevitable and intolerable good fortune

is an admirable creature of broad comedy that never subsides or overflows or degenerates into farce.

'A Match at Midnight' is as notable for vivid impression of reality, but not so likely to leave a good taste—as Charlotte Brontë might have said—in the reader's mouth. Ancient Young, the hero, is a fine fellow; but Messrs. Earlack and Carvegut are hardly amusing enough to reconcile us to toleration of such bad company. It is cleverly composed, and the crosses and chances of the night are ingeniously and effectively invented and arranged: there is real and good broad humour in the parts of the usurer and his sons and the attractive but unwidowed Widow Wag. And I am not only free to admit but desirous to remark that a juster and more valuable judgment on such plays as these than any that I could undertake to deliver may very possibly be expected from readers whom they may more thoroughly arride—to use a favourite phrase of the all but impeccable critic, the all but infallible judge, whose praise has set the name of Rowley so high in the rank of realistic painters and historic naturalists for ever.

The copies of two dramatic nondescripts now happily preserved and duly treasured in the library of the British Museum bear inscribed in

the same old hand, at the head of the first page and again on the last page under the last line, the same contemptuous three words—'silly old story.' And I fear it can hardly be maintained that either Chapman, when writing 'The Blind Beggar of Alexandria,' or Rowley, when writing 'A Shoemaker, a Gentleman,' was engaged in any very rational or felicitous employment of his wayward and unregulated powers. 'The Printer' of the play last named assures 'the Reader' of 1638, whom he assumes to be a member of the gentle craft, that 'as plays were then, some twenty years agone, it was in the fashion.' A singular fashion, the rare modern reader will probably reflect: especially when he remembers how far finer and how thoroughly charming a tribute of dramatic and poetic celebration had been paid full eighteen years earlier to the same favoured craft by the sweeter and rarer genius of Dekker. This quaintly apologetic assurance of bygone popularity in subject and in style will remind all probable readers of Heywood's prologue to 'The Royal King and Loyal Subject,' and his dedicatory address prefixed to 'The Four Prentices of London.' It happily was not, however, in the printer's power to aver that such impudently immetrical verse as Rowley at once breaks ground with was ever in fashion with any of his famous fellows. Nothing can be

worse than the headlong and slipshod stumble of Dekker's at its worst; but his were the faults of hurry and impatience and shamefully scamped work: Rowley's, if I mistake not, is the far graver error of a preposterous theory that broken verse, rough and untunable as the shock of short chopping waves, is more dramatic and liker the natural speech of men and women than the rolling and flowing verse of Marlowe and of Shakespeare: which is as much liker life as it is nobler and more satisfying in workmanship. In reading bad verse the reader is constantly reminded that he is not reading good prose; and this is not the effect produced by true realism—the impression left by actual intercourse or faithful presentation of it.

The hagiology of this eccentric play is more like Shirley's in 'St. Patrick for Ireland' than Dekker's and Massinger's in 'The Virgin Martyr.' Assuredly there is here nothing like the one incomparably lovely dialogue of Dorothea with her attendant angel. But there is the charm of a curious simplicity and sincerity in Rowley's straightforward and homely dramatic handling of the supernatural element: in the miracle of St. Winifred's well, and the conversion of Albon into St. Alban by 'that seminary knight,' as the tyrant Maximinus rather comically calls him,

Amphiabel Prince of Wales. The courtship of the princely Offa, while disguised as the shoemaker's apprentice Crispinus, by the Roman princess Laodice, daughter of Maximinus, is very lively and dramatic: the sprightliest scene, I should say, ever played out on the stage of Rowley's fancy. On the other hand, the martyrdom of St. Winifred and St. Hugh is an abject tragic failure; an abortive attempt at cheap terror and jingling pity, followed up by doggrel farce of intolerable grossness.

This play is a perfect repertory of slang and quaint phrases: as when the master shoemaker, who has for apprentices two persecuted princes in disguise, and is a very inferior imitation of Dekker's admirable Simon Eyre, calls his wife Lady d'Oliva—whatever that may mean, and when she inquires of one of the youngsters, 'What's the matter, boy? Why are so many chancery bills drawn in thy face?' *Habent sua fata libelli:* it is inexplicable that this most curious play should never have been republished, when the volumes of Dodsley's 'Old Plays' in their very latest reissue are encumbered with heaps of such leaden dullness and such bestial filth as no decent scavenger and no rational nightman would have dreamed of sweeping back into sight and smell of any possible reader.

But it is or it should be inconceivable and incredible that the masterpiece of Rowley's strong and singular genius, a play remarkable for its peculiar power or fusion of strange powers even in the sovereign age of Shakespeare, should have waited upwards of three hundred years and should still be waiting for the appearance of a second edition. The tragedy of 'All's lost by Lust,' published in the same year with Shakespeare's great posthumous torso of romantic tragedy, was evidently a favourite child of its author's: the terse and elaborate argument subjoined to the careful and exhaustive list of characters may suffice to prove it. Among these characters we may note that one, 'a simple clownish Gentleman,' was 'personated by the poet': and having noted it, we cannot but long, with a fruitless longing, for such confidences as to the impersonation of the leading characters in other memorable plays of the period. There is some really good rough humour in the part of this honest clown and his fellows; but no duly appreciative reader will doubt that the author's heart was in the work devoted to the tragic and poetic scenes of a play which shows that the natural bent of his powers was towards tragedy rather than comedy. Alike as poet and as dramatist, he rises far higher and enjoys his work far more when the aim of his

flight is towards the effects of imaginative terror and pity than when it is confined to the effects of humorous or pathetic realism. In the very first scene we breathe the air of tragic romance and imminent evil provoked by coalition rather than collision of the will of man with the doom of destiny; and the king's defiance of prophecy and tradition is so admirably rendered or suggested as a sign of brutal and egotistic rather than chivalrous or manful daring as to prepare the way with great dramatic and poetic skill for the subsequent scenes of attempted seduction and ultimate violation. With these the underplot, interesting and original in itself, well conceived and well carried through, is happily and naturally interwoven. The noble soliloquy of the invading and defeated Moorish king is by grace of Lamb familiar to all true lovers of the higher dramatic poetry of England. Nothing can be livelier and more natural than the scenes in which a recent bridegroom's heart is won from his loving and low-born wife by the offered hand and the sprightly seductions of a light-hearted and high-born rival. But the crowning scene of the play and the crowning grace of the poem is the interview of father and daughter after the consummation of the crime which gave Spain into the hand of the Moor. The vivid dramatic life in every word is even more

admirable than the great style, the high poetic spirit of the scene. I have always ventured to wonder that Lamb, whose admiration has made it twice immortal, did not select as a companion or a counterpart to it that other great camp scene from Webster's 'Appius and Virginia' in which another outraged warrior and father stirs up his friends and fellow-soldiers to vindication of his honour and revenge for his wrong. It is surely even finer and more impressive than that selected in preference to it, which closes with the immolation of Virginia.

The scenes in which the tragic underplot of Rowley's tragedy is deftly and effectively wound up are full of living action and passion; that especially in which the revenge of a deserted wife is wreaked mistakingly on the villainous minion to whose instigation she owes the infidelity of the husband for whom she mistakes him. The gross physical horrors which deform the close of a noble poem are relieved if not beautified by the great style of its age—an age unparalleled in wealth and variety of genius, a style unmatchable for its union of inspired and imaginative dignity with actual and vivid reality of impassioned and lofty life.

No comparison is possible, nor if possible could it be profitable, between the somewhat rough-hewn

English oak of Rowley's play and the flawless Roman steel of Landor's great Miltonic tragedy on the same subject. The fervent praise of Southey was not too generous to be just in its estimate of that austere masterpiece; it is lamentable to remember the injustice of its illustrious author to the men of Shakespeare's day. I fear he would certainly not have excepted the noble work of his precursor from his general condemnation or impeachment of 'their bloody bawdries'—a misjudgment gross enough for Hallam—or Voltaire when declining to the level of a Hallam. Landor was as headlong as these were hidebound, as fitful as they were futile; but not even the dispraise or the disrelish of a finer if not of a greater dramatic poet could affect the credit or impair the station of one on whose merits the final sentence of appreciation has been irrevocably pronounced by the verdict of Charles Lamb.

THOMAS HEYWOOD

If it is difficult to write at all on any subject once ennobled by the notice of Charles Lamb without some apprehensive sense of intrusion and presumption, least of all may we venture without fear of trespass upon ground so consecrated by his peculiar devotion as the spacious if homely province or demesne of the dramatist whose highest honour it is to have earned from the finest of all critics the crowning tribute of a sympathy which would have induced him to advise an intending editor or publisher of the dramatists of the Shakespearean age to begin by a reissue of the works of Heywood. The depth and width of his knowledge, the subtlety and the sureness of his intuition, place him so far ahead of any other critic or scholar who has ever done any stroke of work in any part of the same field that it may seem overbold for any such subordinate to express or to suggest a suspicion that this counsel would

have been rather the expression of a personal and a partly accidental sympathy than the result of a critical and a purely rational consideration. And yet I can hardly think it questionable that it must have been less the poetic or essential merit than the casual or incidental associations of Heywood's work which excited so exceptional an enthusiasm in so excellent a judge. For as a matter of fact it must be admitted that in one instance at least the objections of the carper Hazlitt are better justified than the commendations of the finer and more appreciative critic. The rancorous democrat who shared with Byron the infamy of sympathetic admiration for the enemy of England and the tyrant of France found for once an apt and a fair occasion to vent his spleen against the upper classes of his countrymen in criticism of the under-plot of Heywood's most celebrated play. Lamb, thinking only of the Frankfords, Wincotts, and Geraldines whose beautiful and noble characters are the finest and surest witnesses to the noble and beautiful nature of their designer's, observes that 'Heywood's characters, his country gentlemen, &c., are exactly what we see (but of the best kind of what we see) in life.' But such country gentlemen as his Actons and Mountfords are surely of a worse than the worst kind; more cruel or more irrational, more base or more perverse, than we

need fear to see in life unless our experience should be exceptionally unfortunate. Lamb indeed is rather an advocate than a judge in the case of his fellow-Londoners Thomas Heywood and William Rowley; but his pleading is better worth our attention than the summing up of a less cordial or less competent critic.

From critics or students who regard with an academic smile of cultivated contempt the love for their country or the faith in its greatness which distinguished such poor creatures as Virgil and Dante, Shakespeare and Milton, Coleridge and Wordsworth, no tolerance can be expected for the ingrained and inveterate provinciality of a poet whose devotion to his homestead was not merely that of an Englishman but that of a Londoner, no less fond and proud of his city than of his country. The quaint, homely, single-hearted municipal loyalty of an old-world burgess, conscious of his station as 'a citizen of no mean city,' and proud even of the insults which provincials might fling at him as a cockney or aristocrats as a tradesman, is so admirably and so simply expressed in the person of Heywood's first hero—the first in date, at all events, with whom a modern reader can hope to make acquaintance—that the nobly plebeian pride of the city poet is as unmistakably personal as the tenderness of the dramatic artist

who has made the last night of the little princes in the Tower as terribly and pathetically real for the reader as Millais has made it for the spectator of the imminent tragedy. Why Shakespeare shrank from the presentation of it, and left to a humbler hand the tragic weight of a subject so charged with tenderness and terror, it might seem impertinent or impossible to conjecture—except to those who can perceive and appreciate the intense and sensitive love of children which may haply have made the task distasteful if not intolerable: but it is certain that even he could hardly have made the last words of the little fellows more touchingly and sweetly lifelike.

Were there nothing further to commend in the two parts of the historical play or chronicle history of 'King Edward IV.,' this would suffice to show that the dramatic genius of Heywood was not unjustified of its early and perilous venture: but the hero of these two plays is no royal or noble personage, he is plain Matthew Shore the goldsmith. We find ourselves at once in what Coleridge would have called the anachronic atmosphere of Elizabethan London; our poet is a champion cockney, whose interest is really much less in the rise and fall of princes than in the homely loyalty of shopkeepers and the sturdy

gallantry of their apprentices. The lively, easy, honest improvisation of the opening scenes has a certain value in its very crudity and simplicity: the homespun rhetoric and the jogtrot jingle are signs at once of the date and of the class to which these plays must be referred. The parts of the rebels are rough-hewn rather than vigorous; the comic or burlesque part of Josselin is very cheap and flimsy farce. The peculiar powers of Heywood in pathetic if not in humorous writing were still in abeyance or in embryo. Pathos there is of a true and manly kind in the leading part of Shore; but it has little or nothing of the poignant and intense tenderness with which Heywood was afterwards to invest the similar part of Frankford. Humour there is of a genuine plainspun kind in the scenes which introduce the King as the guest of the tanner; Hobs and his surroundings, Grudgen and Goodfellow, are presented with a comic and cordial fidelity which the painter of Falstaff's 'villeggiatura,' the creator of Shallow, Silence, and Davy, might justly and conceivably have approved. It is rather in the more serious or ambitious parts that we find now and then a pre-Shakespearean immaturity of manner. The recurrent burden of a jingling couplet in the cajoleries of the procuress Mrs. Blague is a survival from the most primitive and conventional form of dramatic

writing not yet thoroughly superseded and suppressed by the successive influences of Marlowe, of Shakespeare, and of Jonson ; while the treatment of character in such scenes as that between Clarence, Richard, and Dr. Shaw is crude and childish enough for a rival contemporary of Peele. The beautiful and simple part of Ayre, a character worthy to have been glorified by the mention and commendation of Heywood's most devoted and most illustrious admirer, is typical of the qualities which Lamb seems to have found most lovable in the representative characters of his favourite playwright.

In that prodigious monument of learning and labour, Mr. Fleay's 'Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama,' the common attribution of these two plays to Heywood is impeached on the æsthetic score that 'they are far better than his other early work.' I have carefully endeavoured to do what justice might be done to their modest allowance of moderate merit ; but whether they be Heywood's or—as Mr. Fleay, on apparent grounds of documentary evidence, would suggest—the work of Chettle and Day, I am certainly rather inclined to agree with the general verdict of previous criticism, which would hardly admit their equality and would decidedly question their claim to anything more than equality of merit with the least

admirable or memorable of Heywood's other plays. Even the rough-hewn chronicle, 'If you know not me you know nobody,' by which 'the troubles of Queen Elizabeth' before her accession are as nakedly and simply set forth in the first part as in the second are 'the building of the Royal Exchange' and 'the famous victory' over the Invincible Armada, has on the whole more life and spirit, more interest and movement, in action as in style. The class of play to which it belongs is historically the most curious if poetically the least precious of all the many kinds enumerated by Heywood in earnest or by Shakespeare in jest as popular or ambitious of popularity on the stage for which they wrote. Aristophanic licence of libel or caricature, more or less ineffectually trammelled by the chance or the likelihood of prosecution and repression, is common under various forms to various ages and countries; but the serious introduction and presentation of contemporary figures and events give to such plays as these as mixed and peculiar a quality as though the playwright's aim or ambition had been to unite in his humble and homespun fashion the two parts of an epic or patriotic historian and a political or social caricaturist; a poet and a pamphleteer on the same page, a chronicler and a jester in the same breath. Of this Elizabethan chronicle the first part is the

more literal and prosaic in its steady servility to actual record and registered fact: the bitterest enemy of poetic or dramatic fiction, from William Prynne to Thomas Carlyle, might well exempt from his else omnivorous appetite of censure so humble an example of such obsequious and unambitious fidelity. Of fiction or imagination there is indeed next to none. In Thomas Drue's play of 'The Duchess of Suffolk,' formerly and plausibly misattributed to Heywood, part of the same ground is gone over in much the same fashion and to much the same effect; but the subject, a single interlude of the Marian persecution, has more unity of interest than can be attained by any play running on the same line as Heywood's, from the opening to the close of the most hideous episode in our history. That the miserable life and reign of Mary Tudor should have been 'staged to the show' for the edification and confirmation of her half-sister's subjects in Protestant and patriotic fidelity of animosity towards Rome and Spain is less remarkable than that the same hopelessly improper topic for historical drama should in later days have been selected for dramatic treatment by English writers, and on one occasion by a great English poet. As there are within the range of any country's history, authentic or traditional, periods and characters in themselves so naturally

fit and proper for transfiguration by poetry that the dramatist who should attempt to improve on the truth—the actual or imaginary truth accepted as fact with regard to them—would probably if not certainly derogate from it, so are there others which cannot be transfigured without transformation. Such a character is the last and wretchedest victim of a religious reaction which blasted her kingdom with the hellfire of reviving devil-worship, and her name with the ineffaceable brand of an inseparable and damning epithet. If even the genius of Tennyson could not make the aspirations and the agonies of Mary as acceptable or endurable from the dramatic or poetic point of view as Marlowe and Shakespeare could make the sufferings of such poor wretches as their Edward the Second and Richard the Second, it is hardly to be expected that the humbler if more dramatic genius of Heywood should have triumphed over the desperate obstacle of a subject so drearily repulsive: but it is curious that both should have attempted to tackle the same hopeless task in the same fruitless fashion. The 'chronicle history' of Mary Tudor, had Shakespeare's self attempted it, could scarcely have been other—if we may judge by our human and fallible lights of the divine possibilities open to a superhuman and infallible intelligence—than a splendid and priceless failure from the dramatic or

poetic point of view. The one chance open even to Shakespeare would have been to invent, to devise, to create; not to modify, to adapt, to adjust. Bloody Mary has been transfigured into a tragic and poetic malefactress: but only by the most audacious and magnificent defiance of history and possibility. Madonna Lucrezia Estense Borgia (to use the proper ceremonial style adopted for the exquisitely tender and graceful dedication of the 'Asolani') died peaceably in the odour of incense offered at her shrine in the choicest Latin verse of such accomplished poets and acolytes as Pietro Bembo and Ercole Strozzi. Nothing more tragic or dramatic could have been made of her peaceful and honourable end than of the reign of Mary Tudor as recorded in history. The greatest poet and dramatist of the nineteenth century has chosen to immortalize them by violence—to give them a life, or to give a life to their names, which history could not give. Neither he nor Shakespeare could have kept faith with the torpid fact and succeeded in the creation of a living and eternal truth. One thing may be registered to the credit, not indeed of the dramatist or the poet, but certainly of the man and the Englishman: the generous fair play shown to Philip II. in the scene which records his impartial justice done upon the Spanish assassin of an English victim. There is a charac-

teristic manliness about Heywood's patriotism which gives a certain adventitious interest to his thinnest or homeliest work on any subject admitting or requiring the display of such a quality. In the second and superior part of this dramatic chronicle it informs the humbler comic parts with more life and spirit, though not with heartier devotion of goodwill, than the more ambitious and comparatively though modestly high-flown close of the play: which is indeed in the main rather a realistic comedy of city life, with forced and formal interludes of historical pageant or event, than a regular or even an irregular historical drama. Again the trusty cockney poet has made his hero and protagonist of a plain London tradesman: and has made of him at once a really noble and a heartily amusing figure. His better-born apprentice, a sort of Elizabethan Gil Blas or Gusman d'Alfarache, would be an excellent comic character if he had been a little more plausibly carried through to the close of his versatile and venturous career; as it is, the farce becomes rather impudently cheap; though in the earlier passages of Parisian trickery and buffoonery there is a note of broad humour which may remind us of Molière — not of course the Molière of Tartuffe, but the Molière of M. de Pourceaugnac. The curious alterations made in later versions of the closing scene

are sometimes though not generally for the better.

Lamb, in a passage which no reader can fail to remember, has declared that 'posterity is bound to take care' (an obligation, I fear, of a kind which posterity is very far from careful to discharge) 'that a writer loses nothing by such a noble modesty' as that which induced Heywood to set as little store by his dramatic works as could have been desired in the rascally interest of those 'harlotry players' who thought it, forsooth, 'against their peculiar profit to have them come in print.' But I am not sure that it was altogether a noble or at all a rational modesty which made him utter the avowal or the vaunt—'It never was any great ambition in me, to be in this kind voluminously read.' For, eight years after this well-known passage was in print, when publishing a 'Chronographicall History of all the Kings, and memorable passages of this Kingdome, from Brute to the Reigne of our Royall Soveraigne King Charles,' he offers, on arriving at the accession of Elizabeth, 'an apologie of the Author' for slurring or skipping the record of her life and times in a curious passage which curiously omits as unworthy of mention his dramatic work on the subject, while complacently enumerating his certainly less valuable and memorable other tributes to the great

queen's fame as follows:—'To write largely of her troubles, being a princesse, or of her rare and remarkable Reigne after she was Queen, I should but feast you with dyet twice drest: Having my selfe published a discourse of the first: from her cradle to her crowne; and in another bearing Title of the nine worthy Women: she being the last of the rest in time and place; though equall to any of the former both in religious vertue, and all masculine magnanimity.' This surely looks but too much as though the dramatist and poet thought more of the chronicler and compiler than of the truer Heywood whose name is embalmed in the affection and admiration of his readers even to this day; as though the author of 'A Challenge for Beauty,' 'The Fair Maid of the West,' and 'A Woman killed with Kindness,' must have hoped and expected to be remembered rather as the author of 'Troja Britannica,' 'Γυναικεῖον,' 'The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels,' and even this 'Life of Merlin, sirnamed Ambrosius. His Prophesies, and Predictions Interpreted; and their truth made good by our English Annalls': undoubtedly, we may believe, 'a Subject never published in this kind before, and deserves' (*sic*) 'to be knowne and observed by all men.' Here follows the motto: 'Quotque aderant Vates, rebar adesse Deos.' The biographer and chronographer

would apparently have been less flattered than surprised to hear that he would be remembered rather as the creator of Frankford, Mountferrers, and Geraldine, than as the chronicler of King Brute, Queen Elizabeth, and King James.

The singular series of plays which covers much the same ground as Caxton's immortal and delightful chronicle of the 'Histories' of Troy may of course have been partially inspired by that most enchanting 'recuyell': but Heywood, as will appear on collation or confrontation of the dramatist with the historian, must have found elsewhere the suggestion of some of his most effective episodes. The excellent simplicity and vivacity of style, the archaic abruptness of action and presentation, are equally noticeable throughout all the twenty-five acts which lead us from the opening of the Golden to the close of the Iron Age; but there is a no less perceptible advance or increase of dramatic and poetic invention in the ten acts devoted to the tale of Troy and its sequel. Not that there is anywhere any want of good simple spirited work, homely and lively and appropriate to the ambitious humility of the design; a design which aims at making popular and familiar to the citizens of Elizabethan London the whole cycle of heroic legend from the reign of Saturn to the death of Helen. Jupiter, the young

hero of the first two plays and ages, is a really brilliant and amusing mixture of Amadis, Sigurd, and Don Juan: the pretty scene in which his infant life is spared and saved must be familiar, and pleasantly familiar, to all worthy lovers of Charles Lamb. The verse underlined and immortalised by his admiration—'For heaven's sake, when you kill him, hurt him not'—should suffice to preserve and to embalm the name of the writer. I can scarcely think that a later scene, apparently imitated from the most impudent idyl of Theocritus, can have been likely to elevate the moral tone of the young gentleman who must have taken the part of Callisto; but the honest laureate of the city, stern and straightforward as he was in the enforcement of domestic duties and contemporary morals, could be now and then as audacious in his plebeian fashion as even Fletcher himself in his more patrician style of realism. There is spirit of a quiet and steady kind in the scenes of war and adventure that follow: Heywood, like Caxton before him, makes of Saturn and the Titans very human and simple figures, whose doings and sufferings are presented with childlike straightforwardness in smooth and fluent verse and in dialogue which wants neither strength nor ease nor propriety. The subsequent episode of Danae is treated with such frank and charming fusion of

realism and romance as could only have been achieved in the age of Shakespeare. To modern readers it may seem unfortunate for Heywood that a poet who never (to the deep and universal regret of all competent readers) followed up the dramatic promise of his youth, as displayed in the nobly vivid and pathetic little tragedy of 'Sir Peter Harpdon's End,' should in our day have handled the story of Danae and the story of Bellerophon so effectively as to make it impossible for the elder poet either to escape or to sustain comparison with the author of 'The Earthly Paradise': but the most appreciative admirers of Morris will not be the slowest or the least ready to do justice to the admirable qualities displayed in Heywood's dramatic treatment of these legends. The naturally sweet and spontaneous delicacy of the later poet must not be looked for in the homely and audacious realism of Heywood; in whose work the style of the Knight's Tale and the style of the Miller's Tale run side by side and hand in hand.

From the Golden Age to the Iron Age the growth and ascent of Heywood's dramatic power may fairly be said to correspond in a reversed order with the degeneracy and decline of human heroism and happiness in the legendary gradation or degradation of the classical four ages. 'The

Golden Age' is a delightful example of dramatic poetry in its simplest and most primary stage; in 'The Silver Age' the process of evolution is already visible at work. Bellerophon and Aurea cannot certainly be compared with the Joseph and Phraxanor of Charles Wells: but the curt and abrupt scene in which they are hastily thrust on the stage and as hastily swept off it is excellently composed and written. The highest possible tribute to the simple and splendid genius of Plautus is paid by the evidence of the fact that all his imitators have been obliged to follow so closely on the lines of his supernatural, poetical, and farcical comedy of Amphitryon. Heywood, Rotrou, Molière, and Dryden have sat at his feet and copied from his dictation like schoolboys. The French pupils, it must be admitted, have profited better and shown themselves apter and happier disciples than the English. I cannot think that even Molière has improved on the text of Rotrou as much, or nearly as much, as he has placed himself under unacknowledged obligation to his elder countryman: but in Dryden's version there is a taint of greasy vulgarity, a reek of obtrusive ruffianism, from which Heywood's version is as clean as Shakespeare's could have been, had he bestowed on the 'Amphitruo' the honour he conferred on the 'Menæchmi.' The power

of condensation into a few compact scenes of material sufficient for five full acts is a remarkable and admirable gift of Heywood's.

After the really dramatic episode in which he had the advantage of guidance by the laughing light of a greater comic genius than his own, Heywood contentedly resumes the simple task of arranging for the stage a mythological chronicle of miscellaneous adventure. The jealousy of Juno is naturally the mainspring of the action and the motive which affords some show of connection or coherence to the three remaining acts of 'The Silver Age': the rape of Proserpine, the mourning and wandering and wrath of Ceres, are treated with so sweet and beautiful a simplicity of touch that Milton may not impossibly have embalmed and transfigured some reminiscence of these scenes in a passage of such heavenly beauty as custom cannot stale. Another episode, and one not even indirectly connected with the labours of Hercules, is the story of Semele, handled with the same simple and straightforward skill of dramatic exposition, the same purity and fluency of blameless and spontaneous verse, that distinguish all parts alike of this dramatic chronicle. The second of the five plays composing it closes with the rescue of Proserpine by Hercules, and the judgment of Jupiter on 'the Arraignment of the Moon.'

In 'The Brazen Age' there is somewhat more of dramatic unity or coherence than in the two bright easy-going desultory plays which preceded it: it closes at least with a more effective catastrophe than either of them in the death of Hercules. However far inferior to the haughty and daring protest or appeal in which Sophocles, speaking through the lips of the virtuous Hyllus, impeaches and denounces the iniquity of heaven with a steadfast and earnest vehemence unsurpassed in its outspoken rebellion by any modern questioner or blasphemer of divine providence, the simple and humble sincerity of the English playwright has given a not unimpressive or inharmonious conclusion to the same superhuman tragedy. In the previous presentation of the story of Meleager, Heywood has improved upon the brilliant and passionate rhetoric of Ovid by the introduction of an original and happy touch of dramatic effect: his Althæa, after firing the brand with which her son's life is destined to burn out, relents and plucks it back for a minute from the flame, giving the victim a momentary respite from torture, a fugitive recrudescence of strength and spirit, before she rekindles it. The pathos of his farewell has not been overpraised by Lamb: who might have added a word in recognition of the very spirited and effective suicide of Althæa,

not unworthily heralded or announced in such verses as these:

> This was my son,
> Born with sick throes, nursed from my tender breast,
> Brought up with feminine care, cherished with love;
> His youth my pride; his honour all my wishes;
> So dear, that little less he was than life.

The subsequent adventures of Hercules and the Argonauts are presented with the same quiet straightforwardness of treatment: it is curious that the tragic end of Jason and Medea should find no place in the multifarious chronicle which is nominally and mainly devoted to the record of the life and death of Hercules, but into which the serio-comic episode of Mars and Venus and Vulcan is thrust as crudely and abruptly as it is humorously and dramatically presented. The rivalry of Omphale and Deianeira for their hero's erratic affection affords a lively and happy mainspring—not suggested by Caxton—for the tragic action and passion of the closing scenes.

At the opening of 'The Iron Age,' nineteen years later in date of publication, we find ourselves at last arrived in a province of dramatic poetry where something of consecutive and coherent action is apparently the aim if not always the achievement of the writer. These ten acts do

really constitute something like a play, and a play of serious, various, progressive, and sustained interest, beginning with the elopement and closing with the suicide of Helen. There is little in it to suggest the influence of either Homer or Shakespeare: whose 'Troilus and Cressida' had appeared in print, for the helplessly bewildered admiration of an eternally mystified world, just twenty-three years before. The only figure equally prominent in either play is that of Thersites: but Heywood, happily and wisely, has made no manner of attempt to rival or to reproduce the frightful figure of the intelligent Yahoo in which the sane and benignant genius of Shakespeare has for once anticipated and eclipsed the mad and malignant genius of Swift. It should be needless to add that his Ulysses has as little of Shakespeare's as of Homer's: and that the brutalisation or degradation of the godlike figures of Ajax and Achilles is only less offensive in the lesser than in the greater poet's work. In the friendly duel between Hector and Ajax the very text of Shakespeare is followed with exceptional and almost servile fidelity: but the subsequent exchange of gifts is, of course, introduced in imitation of earlier and classic models. The contest of Ajax and Ulysses is neatly and spiritedly cast into dramatic form: Ovid, of

course, remains unequalled, as he who runs may read in Dryden's grand translation, but Heywood has done better—to my mind at least—than Shirley was to do in the next generation; though it is to be noted that Shirley has retained more of the magnificent original than did his immediate precursor: but the death of Ajax is too pitiful a burlesque to pass muster even as a blasphemous travestie of the sacred text of Sophocles. In the fifth play of this pentalogy Heywood has to cope with no such matchless models or precursors; and it is perhaps the brightest and most interesting of the five. Sinon is a spirited and rather amusing understudy of Thersites: his seduction of Cressida is a grotesquely diverting variation on the earlier legend relating to the final fall of the typical traitress; and though time and space are wanting for the development or indeed the presentation of any more tragic or heroic character, the rapid action of the last two acts is workmanlike in its simple fashion: the complicated or rather accumulated chronicle of crime and retribution may claim at least the credit due to straightforward lucidity of composition and sprightly humility of style.

In 'Love's Mistress, or The Queen's Masque,' the stage chronicler or historian of the Four Ages appears as something more of a dramatic poet:

his work has more of form and maturity, with no whit less of spontaneity and spirit, simplicity and vivacity. The framework or setting of these five acts, in which Midas and Apuleius play the leading parts, is sustained with lively and homely humour from induction to epilogue: the story of Psyche is thrown into dramatic form with happier skill and more graceful simplicity by Heywood than afterwards by Molière and Corneille; though there is here nothing comparable with the famous and exquisite love-scene in which the genius of Corneille renewed its youth and replumed its wing with feathers borrowed from the heedless and hapless Théophile's. The fortunes of Psyche in English poetry have been as curious and various as her adventures on earth and elsewhere. Besides and since this pretty little play of Heywood's, she has inspired a long narrative poem by Marmion, one of the most brilliant and independent of the younger comic writers who sat at the feet or gathered round the shrine of Ben Jonson; a lyrical drama by William the Dutchman's poet laureate, than which nothing more portentous in platitude ever crawled into print, and of which the fearfully and wonderfully wooden verse evoked from Shadwell's great predecessor in the office of court rhymester an immortalising reference to 'Prince Nicander's vein'; a mag-

nificent ode by Keats, and a very pretty example of metrical romance by Morris.

'Inexplicable and eccentric as were the moods and fashions of dramatic poetry in an age when Shakespeare could think fit to produce anything so singular in its composition and so mysterious in its motive as "Troilus and Cressida," the most eccentric and inexplicable play of its time, or perhaps of any time, is probably "The Rape of Lucrece."' This may naturally be the verdict of a hasty reader at a first glance over the parti-coloured scenes of a really noble tragedy, crossed and chequered with the broadest and quaintest interludes of lyric and erotic farce. But, setting these eccentricities duly or indulgently aside, we must recognise a fine specimen of chivalrous and romantic rather than classical or mythological drama; one, if not belonging properly or essentially to the third rather than to the second of the four sections into which Heywood's existing plays may be exhaustively divided, which stands on the verge between them with something of the quaintest and most graceful attributes of either. The fine instinct and the simple skill with which the poet has tempered the villainy of his villains without toning down their atrocities by the alloy of any incongruous quality must be acknowledged as worthily characteristic of a writer who at his

ethical best might be defined as something of a plebeian Sidney. There are touches of criminal heroism and redeeming humanity even in the parts of Sextus and Tullia: the fearless desperation of the doomed ravisher, the conjugal devotion of the hunted parricide, give to the last defiant agony of the abominable mother and son a momentary tone of almost chivalrous dignity. The blank verse is excellent, though still considerably alloyed with rhyme: a fusion or alternation of metrical effects in which the young Heywood was no less skilful and successful, inartistic as the skill and illegitimate as the success may seem to modern criticism, than the young Shakespeare.

The eleven plays already considered make up the two divisions of Heywood's work which with all their great and real merit have least in them of those peculiar qualities most distinctive and representative of his genius: those qualities of which when we think of him we think first, and which on summing up his character as a poet we most naturally associate with his name. As a historical or mythological playwright, working on material derived from classic legends or from English annals, he shows signs now and then, as occasion offers, of the sweet-tempered manliness, the noble kindliness, which won the heart of

Lamb: something too there is in these plays of his pathos, and something of his humour: but if this were all we had of him we should know comparatively little of what we now most prize in him. Of this we find most in the plays dealing with English life in his own day: but there is more of it in his romantic tragicomedies than in his chronicle histories or his legendary complications and variations on the antique. The famous and delicious burlesque of Beaumont and Fletcher cannot often be forgotten but need not always be remembered in reading 'The Four Prentices of London.' Externally the most extravagant and grotesque of dramatic poems, this eccentric tragicomedy of chivalrous adventure is full of poetic as well as fantastic interest. There is really something of discrimination in the roughly and readily sketched characters of the four crusading brothers: the youngest especially is a lifelike model of restless and reckless gallantry as it appears when incarnate in a hot-headed English boy; unlike even in its likeness to the same type as embodied in a French youngster such as the immortal d'Artagnan. Justice has been done by Lamb, and consequently as well as subsequently by later criticism, to the occasionally fine poetry which breaks out by flashes in this Quixotic romance of the City, with its seriocomic ideal of crusading

counter-jumpers: but it has never to my knowledge been observed that in the scene 'where they toss their pikes so,' which aroused the special enthusiasm of the worthy fellow-citizen whose own prentice was to bear the knightly ensign of the Burning Pestle, Heywood, the future object of Dryden's ignorant and pointless insult, anticipated with absolute exactitude the style of Dryden's own tragic blusterers when most busily bandying tennis-balls of ranting rhyme in mutual challenge and reciprocal retort of amœbæan epigram.[1]

It is a pity that Heywood's civic or professional devotion to the service of the metropolis should ever have been worse employed than in the transfiguration of the idealised prentice: it is a greater pity that we cannot exchange all Heywood's extant masques for any one of the two hundred plays or so now missing in which, as he tells us, he 'had either an entire hand, or at least a main finger.'

[1] Compare this with any similar sample of heroic dialogue in *Tyrannic Love* or *The Conquest of Granada*:

> 'Rapier and pike, is that thy honoured play?
> Look down, ye gods, this combat to survey.'
> 'Rapier and pike this combat shall decide:
> Gods, angels, men, shall see me tame thy pride.'
> 'I'll teach thee: thou shalt like my zany be,
> And feign to do my cunning after me.'

This will remind the reader not so much of the *Rehearsal* as of Butler's infinitely superior parody in the heroic dialogue of Cat and Puss.

The literary department of a Lord Mayor's show can hardly be considered as belonging to literature, even when a poet's time and trouble were misemployed in compiling the descriptive prose and the declamatory verse contributed to the ceremony. Not indeed that it was a poet who devoted so much toil and goodwill to celebration or elucidation of the laborious projects and objects both by water and land which then distinguished or deformed the sundry triumphs, pageants, and shows on which Messrs. Christmas Brothers and their most ingenious parent were employed in a more honourable capacity than the subordinate function of versifier or showman—an office combining the parts and the duties of the immortal Mrs. Jarley and her laureate Mr. Slum. Lexicographers might pick out of the text some rare if not unique Latinisms or barbarisms such as 'prestigion' and 'strage': but except for the purpose of such 'harmless drudges' and perhaps of an occasional hunter after samples of the bathetic which might have rewarded the attention of Arbuthnot or Pope, the text of these pageants must be as barren and even to them it would presumably be as tedious a subject of study as the lucubrations of the very dullest English moralist or American humourist; a course of reading digestible only by such constitutions as could survive and assimilate a diet of

Martin Tupper or Mark Twain. And yet even in the very homeliest doggrel of Heywood's or Shakespeare's time there is something comparatively not contemptible; the English, when not alloyed by fantastic or pedantic experiment, has a simple historic purity and dignity of its own; the dullness is not so dreary as the dullness of mediæval prosers, the commonplace is not so vulgar as the commonplace of more modern scribes.

'The Trial of Chivalry' is a less extravagant example of homely romantic drama than 'The Four Prentices of London.' We owe to Mr. Bullen the rediscovery of this play, and to Mr. Fleay the determination and verification of its authorship. In style and in spirit it is perfect Heywood: simple and noble in emotion and conception, primitive and straightforward in construction and expression; inartistic but not ineffectual; humble and facile, but not futile or prosaic. It is a rather more rational and natural piece of work than might have been expected from its author when equipped after the heroic fashion of Mallory or Froissart: its date is more or less indistinctly indicated by occasional rhymes and peculiar conventionalities of diction: and if Heywood in the panoply of a knight-errant may now and then suggest to his reader the figure of Sancho Panza in his master's armour, his pedestrian romance is

so genuine, his modest ambition so high-spirited and high-minded, that it would be juster and more critical to compare him with Don Quixote masquerading in the accoutrements of his esquire. Dick Bowyer, whose life and death are mendaciously announced on the catchpenny title-page, and who (like Tiny Tim in 'A Christmas Carol') 'does *not* die,' is a rather rough, thin, and faint sketch of the bluff British soldier of fortune who appears and reappears to better advantage in other plays of Heywood and his fellows. That this must be classed among the earlier if not the earliest of his works we may infer from the primitive simplicity of a stage direction which recalls another in a play printed five years before. In the second scene of the third act of 'The Trial of Chivalry' we read as follows:—'Enter Forester, missing the other taken away, speaks anything, and exit.' In the penultimate scene of the second part of 'King Edward IV.' we find this even quainter direction, which has been quoted before now as an instance of the stage conditions or habits of the time:—'Jockie is led to whipping over the stage, speaking some words, but of no importance.'

A further and deeper debt of thanks is due to Mr. Bullen for the recovery of 'The Captives, or The Lost Recovered,' after the lapse of nearly three centuries. The singularly prophetic sub-

title of this classic and romantic tragicomedy has been justified at so late a date by the beneficence of chance, in favourable conjunction with the happy devotion and fortunate research of a thorough and a thoroughly able student, as to awaken in all fellow-lovers of dramatic poetry a sense of hopeful wonder with regard to the almost illimitable possibilities of yet further and yet greater treasure to be discovered and recovered from the keeping of 'dust and damned oblivion.' Meantime we may be heartily thankful for the recovery of an excellent piece of work, written throughout with the easy mastery of serious or humorous verse, the graceful pliancy of style and the skilful simplicity of composition, which might have been expected from a mature work of Heywood's, though the execution of it would now and then have suggested an earlier date. The clown, it may be noticed, is the same who always reappears to do the necessary comicalities in Heywood's plays; if hardly 'a fellow of infinite jest,' yet an amusing one in his homely way; though one would have thought that on the homeliest London stage of 1624 the taste for antiphonal improvisation of doggrel must have passed into the limbo of obsolete simplicities. The main plot is very well managed, as with Plautus once more for a model might properly have been expected; the

rather ferociously farcical underplot must surely have been borrowed from some *fabliau.* The story has been done into doggrel by George Colman the younger: but that cleanly and pure-minded censor of the press would hardly have licensed for the stage a play which would have required, if the stage-carpenter had been then in existence, the production of a scene which would have anticipated what Gautier so plausibly plumed himself upon as a novelty in stage effect—imagined for the closing scene of his imaginary tragedy of 'Heliogabalus.'

There are touches of pathetic interest and romantic invention in 'A Maidenhead well Lost': two or three of the leading characters are prettily sketched if not carefully finished, and the style is a graceful compromise between unambitious poetry and mildly spirited prose: but it is hardly to be classed among Heywood's best work of the kind: it has no scenes of such fervid and noble interest, such vivid and keen emotion, as distinguish 'A Challenge for Beauty': and for all its simple grace of writing and ingenuous ingenuity of plot it may not improbably be best remembered by the average modern reader as remarkable for the most amusing and astonishing example on record of anything but 'inexplicable' dumb show—to be paralleled only and hardly by a similar interlude

of no less elaborate arrangement and significant eccentricity in the sole dramatic venture of Henri de Latouche—'La Reine d'Espagne.'

Little favour has been shown by modern critics and even by modern editors to 'The Royal King and the Loyal Subject': and the author himself, in committing it to the tardy test of publication, offered a quaint and frank apology for its old-fashioned if not obsolete style of composition and versification. Yet I cannot but think that Hallam was right and Dyce was wrong in his estimate of a play which does not challenge and need not shrink from comparison with Fletcher's more elaborate, rhetorical, elegant and pretentious tragicomedy of 'The Loyal Subject'; that the somewhat eccentric devotion of Heywood's hero is not more slavish or foolish than the obsequious submission of Fletcher's; and that even if we may not be allowed to make allowance for the primitive straightforwardness or take delight in the masculine simplicity of the elder poet, we must claim leave to object that there is more essential servility of spirit, more preposterous prostration of manhood, in the Russian ideal of Fletcher than in the English ideal of Heywood. The humour is as simple as is the appeal to emotion or sympathetic interest in this primitive tragicomedy; but the comic satire on worldly venality and versatility is as

genuine and honest as the serious exposition of character is straightforward and sincere.

The best of Heywood's romantic plays is the most graceful and beautiful, in detached scenes and passages, of all his extant works. The combination of the two plots—they can hardly be described as plot and underplot—is so dexterously happy that it would do the highest credit to a more famous and ambitious artist: the rival heroes are so really noble and attractive that we are agreeably compelled to condone whatever seems extravagant or preposterous in their relations or their conduct: there is a breath of Quixotism in the air which justifies and ennobles it. The heroines are sketched with natural grace and spirit: it is the more to be regretted that their bearing in the last act should have less of delicacy or modesty than of ingenious audacity in contrivances for striking and daring stage effect; a fault as grave in æsthetics as in ethics, and one rather to have been expected from Fletcher than from Heywood. But the general grace and the occasional pathos of the writing may fairly be set against the gravest fault that can justly be found with so characteristic and so charming a work of Heywood's genius at its happiest and brightest as 'A Challenge for Beauty.'

The line of demarcation between realism and

romance is sometimes as difficult to determine in the work of Heywood as in the character of his time: the genius of England, the spirit of Englishmen, in the age of Shakespeare, had so much of the practical in its romance and so much of the romantic in its practice that the beautiful dramatic poem in which the English heroes Manhurst and Montferrers play their parts so nobly beside their noble Spanish compeers in chivalry ought perhaps to have been classed rather among the studies of contemporary life on which their author's fame must principally and finally depend than among those which have been defined as belonging to the romantic division of his work. There is much the same fusion of interests, as there is much the same mixture of styles, in the conduct of a play for which we have once more to tender our thanks to the living benefactor at once of Heywood and of his admirers. That Mr. Bullen was well advised in putting forward a claim for Heywood as the recognisable author of a play which a few years ago had never seen the light is as evident as that his estimate of the fine English quality which induced this recognition was justified by all rules of moral evidence. There can be less than little doubt that 'Dick of Devonshire' is one of the two hundred and twenty in which Heywood had 'a main finger'—though not, I should say, by any

means 'an entire hand.' The metre is not always up to his homely but decent mark: though in many of the scenes it is worthy of his best plays for smoothness, fluency, and happy simplicity of effect. Dick Pike is a better study of the bluff and tough English hero than Dick Bowyer in 'The Trial of Chivalry': and the same chivalrous sympathy with the chivalrous spirit and tradition of a foreign and a hostile nation which delights us in 'A Challenge for Beauty' pervades and vivifies this long-lost and long-forgotten play. The partial sacrifice of ethical propriety or moral consistency to the actual or conventional exigences of the stage is rather more startling than usual: a fratricidal ravisher and slanderer could hardly have expected even from theatrical tolerance the monstrous lenity of pardon and dismissal with a prospect of being happy though married. The hand of Heywood is more recognisable in the presentation of a clown who may fairly be called identical with all his others, and in the noble answer of the criminal's brother to their father's very natural question, 'Why dost thou take his part so?'

> Because no drop of honour falls from him
> But I bleed with it.

This high-souled simplicity of instinct is as traceable in the earlier as in the later of Heywood's

extant works: he is English of the English in his quiet, frank, spontaneous expression, when suppression is no longer either possible or proper, of all noble and gentle and natural emotion. His passion and his pathos, his loyalty and his chivalry, are always so unobtrusive that their modesty may sometimes run the risk of eclipse before the glory of more splendid poets and more conspicuous patriots: but they are true and trustworthy as Shakespeare's or Milton's or Wordsworth's or Tennyson's or Browning's.

It was many a year before Dick Pike had earned the honour of commemoration by his hand or by any other poet's that Heywood had won his spurs as the champion presenter—if I may be allowed to revive the word—of his humbler and homelier countrymen under the light of a no less noble than simple realism. 'The Fair Maid of the Exchange' is a notable example of what I believe is professionally or theatrically called a one-part piece. Adapting Dr. Johnson's curiously unjust and inept remark on Shakespeare's 'King Henry VIII.'—the play in which, according to the principles or tenets of the new criticism which walks or staggers by the new light of a new scholarship, 'the new Shakspere' may or must have been assisted by Flitcher, (why not also by Meddletun, Messenger, and a few other *novi*

homines?) we may say, and it may be said this time with some show of reason, that the genius of the author limps in and limps out with the Cripple. Most of the other characters and various episodical incidents of the incomposite story are alike, if I may revive a good and expressive phrase of the period, hastily and unskilfully slubbered up: Bowdler is a poor secondhand and thirdrate example of the Jonsonian gull; and the transfer of Moll's regard from him to his friend is both childishly conceived and childishly contrived. On the whole, a secondrate play, with one or two first-rate scenes and passages to which Lamb has done perhaps no more than justice by the characteristic and eloquent cordiality of his commendations. Its date may be probably determined as early among the earliest of its author's by the occurrence in mid dialogue of a sestet in the popular metre of 'Venus and Adonis,' with archaic inequality in the lengths of the second and fourth rhyming words: a notable note of metrical or immetrical antiquity in style. The self-willed if high-minded Phyllis Flower has something in her of Heywood's later heroines, Bess Bridges of Plymouth and Luce the goldsmith's daughter, but is hardly as interesting or attractive as either.

Much less than this can be said for the heroines, if heroines they can in any sense be

called, of the two plays by which Heywood is best known as a tragic and a comic painter of contemporary life among his countrymen. It is certainly not owing to any exceptional power of painting or happiness in handling feminine character that the first place among his surviving works has been generally and rationally assigned to 'A Woman Killed with Kindness.' The fame of this famous realistic tragedy is due to the perfect fitness of the main subject for treatment in the manner of which Heywood was in his day and remains to the present day beyond all comparison the greatest and the most admirable master. It is not that the interest is either naturally greater, or greater by force and felicity of genius in the dramatist, than that of other and far inferior plays. It is not that the action is more artistically managed: it is not that curiosity or sympathy is aroused or sustained with any particular skill. Such a play as 'Fatal Curiosity' is as truthfully lifelike and more tragically exciting: it is in mere moral power and charm, with just a touch of truer and purer poetry pervading and colouring and flavouring and quickening the whole, that the work of a Heywood approves itself as beyond the reach or the ambition of a Lillo. One figure among many remains impressed on his reader's memory once for all: the play is full of

incident, perhaps over full of actors, excellently well written and passably well composed; but it lives, it survives and overtops its fellows, by grace of the character of its hero. The underplot, whether æsthetically or historically considered, is not more singular and sensational than extravagant and unpleasant to natural taste as well as to social instinct: the other agents in the main plot are little more than sketches—sometimes deplorably out of drawing: Anne is never really alive till on her deathbed, and her paramour is never alive—in his temptation, his transgression, or his impenitence—at all. The whole play, as far as we remember or care to remember it, is Frankford: he suffices to make it a noble poem and a memorable play.

The hero of 'The English Traveller,' however worthy to stand beside him as a typical sample of English manhood at its noblest and gentlest, cannot be said to occupy so predominant a place in the conduct of the action or the memory of the reader. The comic Plautine underplot—Plautus always brought good luck to Heywood—is so incomparably preferable to the ugly and unnatural though striking and original underplot of 'A Woman Killed with Kindness' as wellnigh to counterbalance the comparative lack of interest, plausibility, and propriety in the main action.

The seduction of Mrs. Frankford is so roughly slurred over that it is hard to see how, if she could not resist a first whisper of temptation, she can ever have been the loyal wife and mother whose fall we are expected to deplore: but the seduction of Mrs. Wincott, or rather her transformation from the likeness of a loyal and high-minded lady to the likeness of an impudent and hypocritical harlot, is neither explained nor explicable in the case of a woman who dies of a sudden shock of shame and penitence. Her paramour is only not quite so shapeless and shadowy a scoundrel as the betrayer of Frankford: but Heywood is no great hand at a villain: his nobly simple conception and grasp and development of character will here be recognised only in the quiet and perfect portraiture of the two grand old gentlemen and the gallant unselfish youth whom no more subtle or elaborate draughtsman could have set before us in clearer or fuller outline, with more attractive and actual charm of feature and expression.

'The Fair Maid of the West' is one of Heywood's most characteristic works, and one of his most delightful plays. Inartistic as this sort of dramatic poem may seem to the lovers of theatrical composition and sensational arrangement, of emotional calculations and premeditated shocks, it has

a place of its own, and a place of honour, among the incomparably various forms of noble and serious drama which English poets of the Shakespearean age conceived, created, and left as models impossible to reproduce or to rival in any generation of poets or readers, actors or spectators, after the decadent forces of English genius in its own most natural and representative form of popular and creative activity had finally shrivelled up and shuddered into everlasting inanition under the withering blast of Puritanism. Before that blight had fallen upon the country of Shakespeare, the variety and fertility of dramatic form and dramatic energy which distinguished the typical imagination or invention of his countrymen can only be appreciated or conceived by students of what yet is left us of the treasure bequeathed by the fellows and the followers of Shakespeare. Every other man who could speak or write at all was a lyric poet, a singer of beautiful songs, in the generation before Shakespeare's: every other such man in Shakespeare's was a dramatic poet above or beyond all comparison with any later claimant of the title among Shakespeare's countrymen. One peculiarly and characteristically English type of drama which then flourished here and there among more ambitious if not more interesting forms or varieties, and faded for ever with the close of the age of

Shakespeare, was the curious and delightful kind of play dealing with records or fictions of contemporary adventure. The veriest failures in this line have surely something of national and historical interest; telling us as they do of the achievements or in any case of the aspirations and the ideals, the familiar traditions and ambitions and admirations, of our simplest and noblest forefathers. Even such a play as that in which the adventures of the Shirleys were hurried and huddled into inadequate and incoherent presentation as 'The Travels of three English Brothers,' however justly it may offend or dissatisfy the literary critic, can hardly be without attraction for the lover of his country: curiosity may be disappointed of its hope, yet patriotism may find matter for its sympathy. And if so much may be said on behalf of a poetic and dramatic failure, this and far more than this may be claimed on behalf of such plays as 'The Fair Maid of the West' and 'Fortune by Land and Sea.' Of these the first is certainly the better play: I should myself be inclined to rank it among Heywood's very best. He never wrote anything brighter, sprightlier, livelier or fuller of life and energy: more amusing in episodical incident or byplay, more interesting and attractive in the structure or the progress of the main story. No modern

heroine with so strong a dash of the Amazon—so decided a cross of the male in her—was ever so noble, credible and lovable as Bess Bridges: and Plymouth ought really to do itself the honour of erecting a memorial to her poet. An amusing instance of Heywood's incomparable goodnature and sweetness of temper in dealing with the creatures of his genius—incomparable I call it, because in Shakespeare the same beautiful quality is more duly tempered and toned down to more rational compliance with the demands of reason and probability, whether natural or dramatic—is here to be recognised in the redemption of a cowardly bully, and his conversion from a lying ruffian into a loyal and worthy sort of fellow. The same gallant spirit of sympathy with all noble homeliness of character, whether displayed in joyful search of adventure or in manful endurance of suffering and wrong, informs the less excellently harmonious and well-built play which bears the truly and happily English title of 'Fortune by Land and Sea.' It has less romantic interest than the later adventures of the valiant Bess and her Spencer with the amorous king of Fez and his equally erratic consort; not to mention the no less susceptible Italians among whom their lot is subsequently cast: but it is a model of natural and noble simplicity, of homely and lively variety.

There is perhaps more of the roughness and crudity of style and treatment which might be expected from Rowley than of the humaner and easier touch of Heywood in the conduct of the action: the curious vehemence and primitive brutality of social or domestic tyranny may recall the use of the same dramatic motives by George Wilkins in 'The Miseries of Enforced Marriage': but the mixture or fusion of tender and sustained emotion with the national passion for enterprise and adventure is pleasantly and peculiarly characteristic of Heywood.

In 'The Wise Woman of Hogsdon' the dramatic ability of Heywood, as distinct from his more poetic and pathetic faculty, shews itself at its best and brightest. There are not many much better examples of the sort of play usually defined as a comedy of intrigue, but more properly definable as a comedy of action. The special risk to which a purveyor of this kind of ware must naturally be exposed is the tempting danger of sacrificing propriety and consistency of character to effective and impressive suggestions or developments of situation or event; the inclination to think more of what is to happen than of the persons it must happen to—the characters to be actively or passively affected by the concurrence or the evolution of circumstances. Only to the

very greatest of narrative or dramatic artists in creation and composition can this perilous possibility be all but utterly unknown. Poets of the city no less than poets of the court, the homely Heywood as well as the fashionable Fletcher, tripped and fell now and then over this awkward stone of stumbling—a very rock of offence to readers of a more exacting temper or a more fastidious generation than the respective audiences of patrician and plebeian London in the age of Shakespeare. The leading young man of this comedy now under notice is represented as 'a wild-headed gentleman,' and revealed as an abject ruffian of unredeemed and irredeemable rascality. As much and even more may be said of the execrable wretch who fills a similar part in an admirably written play published thirty-six years earlier and verified for the first time as Heywood's by the keen research and indefatigable intuition of Mr. Fleay. The parallel passages cited by him from the broadly farcical underplots are more than suggestive, even if they be not proof positive, of identity in authorship: but the identity in atrocity of the two hideous figures who play the two leading parts must reluctantly be admitted as more serious evidence. The abuse of innocent foreign words or syllables by comparison or confusion with indecent native ones is a simple and school-

boylike sort of jest for which Master Heywood, if impeached as even more deserving of the birch than any boy on his stage, might have pleaded the example of the captain of the school, and protested that his humble audacities, if no less indecorous, were funnier and less forced than Master Shakespeare's. As for the other member of Webster's famous triad, I fear that the most indulgent sentence passed on Master Dekker, if sent up for punishment on the charge of bad language and impudence, could hardly in justice be less than Orbilian or Draconic. But he was apparently if not assuredly almost as incapable as Shakespeare of presenting the most infamous of murderers as an erring but pardonable transgressor, not unfit to be received back with open arms by the wife he has attempted, after a series of the most hideous and dastardly outrages, to dispatch by poison. The excuse for Heywood is simply that in his day as in Chaucer's the orthodox ideal of a married heroine was still none other than Patient Grizel: Shakespeare alone had got beyond it.

The earlier of these two plays, 'a pleasant' if somewhat sensational 'comedy entitled "How to Choose a Good Wife from a Bad,"' is written for the most part in Heywood's most graceful and poetical vein of verse, with beautiful simplicity,

purity, and fluency of natural and musical style. In none of his plays is the mixture or rather the fusion of realism with romance more simply happy and harmonious: the rescue of the injured wife by a faithful lover from the tomb in which, like Juliet, she has been laid while under the soporific influence of a supposed poison could hardly have been better or more beautifully treated by any but the very greatest among Heywood's fellow-poets. There is no merit of this kind in the later play: but from the dramatic if not even from the ethical point of view it is, on the whole, a riper and more rational sort of work. The culmination of accumulating evidence by which the rascal hero is ultimately overwhelmed and put to shame, driven from lie to lie and reduced from retractation to retractation as witness after witness starts up against him from every successive corner of the witch's dwelling, is as masterly in management of stage effect as any contrivance of the kind in any later and more famous comedy: nor can I remember a more spirited and vivid opening to any play than the quarrelling scene among the gamblers with which this one breaks out at once into lifelike action, full of present interest and promise of more to come. The second scene, in which the fair sempstress appears at work in her father s shop,

recalls and indeed repeats the introduction of the heroine in an earlier play: but here again the author's touch is firmer and his simplicity more masculine than before. This coincidence is at least as significant as that between the two samples of flogging-block doggrel collated for comparison by Mr. Fleay: it is indeed a suggestive though superfluous confirmation of Heywood's strangely questioned but surely unquestionable claim to the authorship of 'The Fair Maid of the Exchange.' A curious allusion to a more famous play of the author's is the characteristic remark of the young ruffian Chartley, 'Well, I see you choleric hasty men are the kindest when all is done. Here's such wetting of handkerchers! he weeps to think of his wife, she weeps to see her father cry! Peace, fool, we shall else have thee claim kindred of the woman killed with kindness.' And in the fourth and last scene of the fourth act the same scoundrel is permitted to talk Shakespeare—'I'll go, although the devil and mischance look big.'

Poetical justice may cry out against the dramatic lenity which could tolerate or prescribe for the sake of a comfortable close to this comedy the triumphant escape of a villainous old impostor and baby-farmer from the condign punishment due to her misdeeds; but the severest of criminal

judges if not of professional witch-finders might be satisfied with the justice or injustice done upon 'the late Lancashire Witches' in the bright and vigorous tragicomedy which, as we learn from Mr. Fleay, so unwarrantably and uncharitably (despite a disclaimer in the epilogue) anticipated the verdict of their judges against the defenceless victims of terrified prepossession and murderous perjury. But at this time of day the mere poetical reader or dramatic student need not concern himself, while reading a brilliant and delightful play, with the soundness or unsoundness of its moral and historical foundations. There may have been a boy so really and so utterly possessed by the devil who seems now and then to enter into young creatures of human form and be-monster them as to amuse himself by denouncing helpless and harmless women to the most horrible of deaths on the most horrible of charges: that hideous passing fact does not affect or impair the charming and lasting truth of Heywood's unsurpassable study, the very model of a gallant and lifelike English lad, all compact of fearlessness and fun, audacity and loyalty, so perfectly realised and rendered in this quaint and fascinating play. The admixture of what a modern boy would call cheek and chaff with the equally steadfast and venturesome re-

solution of the indomitable young scapegrace is so natural as to make the supernatural escapades in which it involves him quite plausible for the time to a reader of the right sort: even as (to compare this small masterpiece with a great one) such a reader, while studying the marvellous text of Meinhold, is no more sceptical than is their chronicler as to the sorceries of Sidonia von Bork. And however condemnable or blameworthy the authors of 'The Witches of Lancashire' may appear to a modern reader or a modern magistrate or jurist for their dramatic assumption or presumption in begging the question against the unconvicted defendants whom they describe in the prologue as 'those witches the fat jailor brought to town,' they can hardly have been either wishful or able to influence the course of justice towards criminals of whose evident guilt they were evidently convinced. Shadwell's later play of the same name, though not wanting in such rough realistic humour and coarse-grained homespun interest as we expect in the comic produce of his hard and heavy hand, makes happily no attempt to emulate the really noble touches of poetry and pathos with which Heywood has thrown out into relief the more serious aspect of the supposed crime of witchcraft in its influence or refraction upon the honour and happiness of

innocent persons. Og was naturally more in his place and more in his element as the second 'fat jailor' of Lancashire witches than as the second English dramatic poet of Psyche: he has come closer than his precursors, closer indeed than could have been thought possible, to actual presentation of the most bestial and abominable details of demonolatry recorded by the chroniclers of witchcraft: and in such scenes as are rather transcribed than adapted from such narratives he has imitated his professed master and model, Ben Jonson, by appending to his text, with the most minute and meticulous care, all requisite or more than requisite references to his original authorities. The allied poets who had preceded him were content to handle the matter more easily and lightly, with a quaint apology for having nothing of more interest to offer than 'an argument so thin, persons so low,' that they could only hope their play might 'pass pardoned, though not praised.' Brome's original vein of broad humour and farcical fancy is recognisable enough in the presentation of the bewitched household where the children rule their parents and are ruled by their servants; a situation which may have suggested the still more amusing development of the same fantastic motive in his admirable comedy of 'The Antipodes.' There is a noticeable reference to 'Macbeth' in

the objurgations lavished by the daughter upon the mother under the influence of a revolutionary spell: 'Is this a fit habit for a handsome young gentlewoman's mother? as I hope to be a lady, you look like one o' the Scottish wayward sisters.' The still more broadly comic interlude of the bewitched rustic bridegroom and his loudly reclamatory bride is no less humorously sustained and carried through. Altogether, for an avowedly hasty and occasional piece of work, this tragicomedy is very creditably characteristic of both its associated authors.

How small a fraction of Heywood's actual work is comprised in these twenty-six plays we cannot even conjecturally compute; we only know that they amount to less than an eighth part of the plays written wholly or mainly by his indefatigable hand, and that they are altogether outweighed in volume, though decidedly not in value, by the existing mass of his undramatic work. We know also, if we have eyes to see, that the very hastiest and slightest of them does credit to the author, and that the best of them are to be counted among the genuine and imperishable treasures of English literature. Such amazing fecundity and such astonishing industry would be memorable even in a far inferior writer; but, though I certainly cannot pretend to anything like an exhaustive

or even an adequate acquaintance with all or any of his folios, I can at least affirm that they contain enough delightfully readable matter to establish a more than creditable reputation. His prose, if never to be called masterly, may generally be called good and pure: its occasional pedantries and pretentions are rather signs of the century than faults of the author: and he can tell a story, especially a short story, as well as if not better than many a better-known writer. I fear, however, that it is not the poetical quality of his undramatic verse which can ever be said to make it worth reading: it is, as far as I know, of the very homeliest homespun ever turned out by the very humblest of workmen. His poetry, it would be pretty safe to wager, must be looked for exclusively in his plays: but there, if not remarkable for depth or height of imagination or of passion, it will be found memorable for unsurpassed excellence of unpretentious elevation in treatment of character. The unity (or, to borrow from Coleridge a barbaric word, the triunity) of noble and gentle and simple in the finest quality of the English character at its best—of the English character as revealed in our Sidneys and Nelsons and Collingwoods and Franklins—is almost as apparent in the best scenes of his best plays as in the lives of our chosen and best beloved heroes: and this, I venture

to believe, would have been rightly regarded by Thomas Heywood as a more desirable and valuable success than the achievement of a noisier triumph, or the attainment of a more conspicuous place among the poets of his country.

GEORGE CHAPMAN

GEORGE CHAPMAN, translator of Homer, dramatist, and gnomic poet, was born in 1559, and died in 1634. At fifteen, according to Anthony Wood, 'he, being well grounded in school learning, was sent to the university' of Oxford; at thirty-five he published his first poem, 'The Shadow of Night.' Between these dates, though no fact has been unearthed concerning his career, it is not improbable that he may have travelled in Germany. At thirty-nine he was reckoned 'among the best of our tragic writers for the stage'; but his only play published at that age was a crude and formless attempt at romantic comedy, which had been acted three years before it passed from the stage to the press; and his first tragedy now extant in print, without name of author, did not solicit the suffrage of a reader till the poet was forty-eight. At thirty-nine he had also published the first instalment of his celebrated translation of the 'Iliad,' in a form afterwards much remodelled; at sixty-five he crowned the lofty structure of his

labour by the issue of an English version of the 'Hymns' and other minor Homeric poems. The former he dedicated to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, the hapless favourite of Elizabeth; the latter to Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, the infamous minion of James. Six years earlier he had inscribed to Bacon, then Lord Chancellor, a translation of Hesiod's 'Works and Days.' His only other versions of classic poems are from the fifth satire of Juvenal and the 'Hero and Leander' which goes under the name of Musæus, the latter dedicated to Inigo Jones. His revised and completed version of the 'Iliad' had been inscribed in a noble and memorable poem of dedication to Henry Prince of Wales, after whose death he and his 'Odyssey' fell under the patronage of Carr. Of the manner of his death at seventy-five we know nothing more than may be gathered from the note appended to a manuscript fragment, which intimates that the remainder of the poem, a lame and awkward piece of satire on his old friend Jonson, had been 'lost in his sickness.'

Chapman, his first biographer is careful to let us know, 'was a person of most reverend aspect, religious and temperate, qualities rarely meeting in a poet'; he had also certain other merits at least as necessary to the exercise of that profession. He had a singular force and solidity of

thought, an admirable ardour of ambitious devotion to the service of poetry, a deep and burning sense at once of the duty implied and of the dignity inherent in his office; a vigour, opulence, and loftiness of phrase, remarkable even in that age of spiritual strength, wealth, and exaltation of thought and style; a robust eloquence, touched not unfrequently with flashes of fancy, and kindled at times into heat of imagination. The main fault of his style is one more commonly found in the prose than in the verse of his time—a quaint and florid obscurity, rigid with elaborate rhetoric and tortuous with labyrinthine illustration; not dark only to the rapid reader through closeness and subtlety of thought, like Donne, whose miscalled obscurity is so often 'all glorious within,' but thick and slab as a witch's gruel with forced and barbarous eccentricities of articulation. As his language in the higher forms of comedy is always pure and clear, and sometimes exquisite in the simplicity of its sincere and natural grace, the stiffness and density of his more ambitious style may perhaps be attributed to some pernicious theory or conceit of the dignity proper to a moral and philosophic poet. Nevertheless, many of the gnomic passages in his tragedies and allegoric poems are of singular weight and beauty; the best of these, indeed, would not discredit the fame

of the very greatest poets for sublimity of equal thought and expression: witness the lines chosen by Shelley as the motto for a poem, and fit to have been chosen as the motto for his life.

The romantic and sometimes barbaric grandeur of Chapman's Homer remains attested by the praise of Keats, of Coleridge, and of Lamb; it is written at a pitch of strenuous and laborious exaltation, which never flags or breaks down, but never flies with the ease and smoothness of an eagle native to Homeric air. From his occasional poems an expert and careful hand might easily gather a noble anthology of excerpts, chiefly gnomic or meditative, allegoric or descriptive. The most notable examples of his tragic work are comprised in the series of plays taken, and adapted sometimes with singular licence, from the records of such part of French history as lies between the reign of Francis I. and the reign of Henry IV., ranging in date of subject from the trial and death of Admiral Chabot to the treason and execution of Marshal Biron. The two plays bearing as epigraph the name of that famous soldier and conspirator are a storehouse of lofty thought and splendid verse, with scarcely a flash or sparkle of dramatic action. The one play of Chapman's whose popularity on the stage survived the Restoration is 'Bussy d'Ambois' (d'Amboise),—a

tragedy not lacking in violence of action or emotion, and abounding even more in sublime or beautiful interludes than in crabbed and bombastic passages. His rarest jewels of thought and verse detachable from the context lie embedded in the tragedy of 'Cæsar and Pompey,' whence the finest of them were first extracted by the unerring and unequalled critical genius of Charles Lamb. In most of his tragedies the lofty and labouring spirit of Chapman may be said rather to shine fitfully through parts than steadily to pervade the whole; they show nobly altogether as they stand, but even better by help of excerpts and selections. But the excellence of his best comedies can only be appreciated by a student who reads them fairly and fearlessly through, and, having made some small deductions on the score of occasional pedantry and occasional crudity, finds in 'All Fools,' 'Monsieur d'Olive,' 'The Gentleman Usher,' and 'The Widow's Tears' a wealth and vigour of humorous invention, a tender and earnest grace of romantic poetry, which may atone alike for these passing blemishes and for the lack of such clear-cut perfection of character and such dramatic progression of interest as we find only in the yet higher poets of our heroic age.

The severest critic of his shortcomings or his errors, if not incompetent to appreciate his achieve-

ments and his merits, must recognise in Chapman an original poet, one who held of no man and acknowledged no master, but throughout the whole generation of our greatest men, from the birth of Marlowe wellnigh to the death of Jonson, held on his own hard and haughty way of austere and sublime ambition, not without an occasional pause for kindly and graceful salutation of such younger and still nobler compeers as Jonson and Fletcher. With Shakespeare we should never have guessed that he had come at all in contact, had not the intelligence of Mr. Minto divined or rather discerned him to be the rival poet referred to in Shakespeare's sonnets with a grave note of passionate satire, hitherto as enigmatic as almost all questions connected with those divine and dangerous poems. This conjecture the critic has fortified by such apt collocation and confrontation of passages that we may now reasonably accept it as an ascertained and memorable fact.

The objections which a just and adequate judgment may bring against Chapman's masterwork, his translation of Homer, may be summed up in three epithets: it is romantic, laborious, Elizabethan. The qualities implied by these epithets are the reverse of those which should distinguish a translator of Homer; but setting this apart, and considering the poems as in the

main original works, the superstructure of a romantic poet on the submerged foundations of Greek verse, no praise can be too warm or high for the power, the freshness, the indefatigable strength and inextinguishable fire which animate this exalted work, and secure for all time that shall take cognisance of English poetry an honoured place in its highest annals for the memory of Chapman.

CYRIL TOURNEUR

'THEY, shut up under their roofs, the prisoners of darkness, and fettered with the bonds of a long night, lay exiled, fugitives from the eternal providence. For while they supposed to lie hid in their secret sins, they were scattered under a dark veil of forgetfulness, being horribly astonished, and troubled with sights. . . . Sad visions appeared unto them with heavy countenances. No power of the fire might give them light: neither could the bright flames of the stars endure to lighten that horrible night. Only there appeared unto them a fire kindled of itself, very dreadful: for being much terrified, they thought the things which they saw to be worse than the sight they saw not. . . . . The whole world shined with clear light, and none were hindered in their labour: over them only was spread an heavy night, an image of that darkness which should afterwards receive them: but yet were they unto themselves more grievous than the darkness.' In this wild world of fantastic retribution and prophetic terror

the genius of a great English poet—if greatness may be attributed to a genius which holds absolute command in a strictly limited province of reflection and emotion—was born and lived and moved and had its being. The double mainspring of its energy is not difficult to define: its component parts are simply adoration of good and abhorrence of evil: all other sources of emotion were subordinate to these: love, hate, resentment, resignation, self-devotion, are but transitory agents on this lurid and stormy stage, which pass away and leave only the sombre fire of meditative indignation still burning among the ruins of shattered hopes and lives. More splendid success in pure dramatic dialogue has not been achieved by Shakespeare or by Webster than by Cyril Tourneur in his moments of happiest invention or purest inspiration: but the intensity of his moral passion has broken the outline and marred the symmetry of his general design. And yet he was at all points a poet: there is an accent of indomitable self-reliance, a note of persistence and resistance more deep than any note of triumph, in the very cry of his passionate and implacable dejection, which marks him as different in kind from the race of the great prosaic pessimists whose scorn and hatred of mankind found expression in the contemptuous and rancorous de-

spondency of Swift or of Carlyle. The obsession of evil, the sensible prevalence of wickedness and falsehood, self-interest and stupidity, pressed heavily on his fierce and indignant imagination; yet not so heavily that mankind came to seem to him the 'damned race,' the hopeless horde of millions 'mostly fools' too foolish or too foul to be worth redemption, which excited the laughing contempt of Frederic the Great and the raging contempt of his biographer. On this point the editor to whom all lovers of high poetry were in some measure indebted for the first collection and reissue of his works has done much less than justice to the poet on whose text he can scarcely be said to have expended an adequate or even a tolerable amount of pains. A reader of his introduction who had never studied the text of his author might be forgiven if he should carry away the impression that Tourneur, as a serious or tragic poet, was little more than a better sort of Byron; a quack less impudent but not less transparent than the less inspired and more inflated ventriloquist of 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage': whereas it is hardly too much to say that the earnest and fiery intensity of Tourneur's moral rhetoric is no less unmistakable than the blatant and flatulent ineptitude of Byron's.

It seems to me that Tourneur might say with

the greatest of the Popes, 'I have loved justice, and hated iniquity: therefore I die in exile'; therefore, in other words, I am cast aside and left behind by readers who are too lazy, too soft and slow of spirit, too sleepily sensual and self-sufficient, to endure the fiery and purgatorial atmosphere of my work. But there are breaths from heaven as surely as there are blasts from hell in the tumultuous and electric air of it. The cynicism and egotism which the editor already mentioned has the confidence to attribute to him are rather the outer garments than the inner qualities of his genius: the few and simple lines in which his purer and nobler characters are rapidly but not roughly drawn suffice to give them all due relief and all requisite attraction. The virtuous victims of the murderous conspirator whose crimes and punishment are the groundwork of 'The Atheist's Tragedy' have life and spirit enough to make them heartily interesting: and the mixed character of Sebastian, the high-hearted and gallant young libertine whose fearless frankness of generosity brushes aside and breaks away the best-laid schemes of his father, is as vividly and gracefully drawn as any of the same kind on the comic or the tragic stage.

In this earlier of the two plays extant which preserve the name of Cyril Tourneur the magni-

ficent if grotesque extravagance of the design may perhaps be partly accounted for by the didactic or devotional aim of the designer. A more appalling scarecrow or scarebabe, as the contemporaries of his creator would have phrased it, was certainly never begotten by orthodoxy on horror than the figure of the portentous and prodigious criminal who here represents the practical results of indulgence in free thought. It is a fine proof of the author's naturally dramatic genius that this terrific successor of Vanini and precursor of Diderot should be other than a mere man of straw. Huge as is the wilful and deliberate exaggeration of his atrocity, there are scenes and passages in which his daring and indomitable craft is drawn with native skill as well as force of hand; in which it is no mere stage monster, but a genuine man, plausible and relentless, versatile and fearless, who comes before us now clothed in all the cajoleries of cunning, now exultant in all the nakedness of defiance. But indeed, although the construction of the verse and the composition of the play may both equally seem to bear witness of crude and impatient inexperience, there is no lack of life in any of the tragic or comic figures which play their part through these tempestuous five acts. Even so small a figure as the profligate Puritan parasite

of the atheist who hires his hypocrisy to plead against itself is bright with touches of real rough humour. There is not much of this quality in Tourneur's work, and what there is of it is as bitter and as grim in feature and in flavour as might be expected of so fierce and passionate a moralist: but he knows well how to salt his invective with a due sprinkling of such sharply seasoned pleasantry as relieves the historic narrative of John Knox; whose 'merry'[1] account, for instance, of Cardinal Beaton's last night in this world has the very savour of Tourneur's tragic irony and implacable disgust in every vivid and relentless line of it.

The execution of this poem is singularly good and bad: there are passages of such metrical strength and sweetness as will hardly be found in the dramatic verse of any later English poet; and there are passages in which this poet's verse sinks wellnigh to the tragic level of a Killigrew's, a Shadwell's, or a Byron's. Such terminations as 'of,' 'to,' 'with,' 'in,' 'and,' 'my,' 'your,' preceding the substantive or the verb which opens the next verse, make us feel as though we were reading 'Sardanapalus' or 'The Two Foscari'—a sensation not easily to be endured. In a poet so far

[1] 'These thingis we wreat mearelie.'
Works of John Knox, vol. i. p. 180.

superior as Tourneur to the author of those abortions we must seek for an explanation of this perverse error in a transient and tentative theory of realism rather than in an incurable infirmity or obliquity of talent: for no quality is more remarkable in the execution of his masterpiece than his mastery of those metrical properties in which the style of this play is so generally deficient. Whether in dialogue or in monologue, 'The Revenger's Tragedy' is so equally admirable for instinctive obedience to nature and imaginative magnificence of inspiration, so equally perfect in the passionate harmony of its verse and the inspired accuracy of its locution, that years of study and elaboration might have seemed necessary to bring about this inexpressible improvement in expression of yet more sombre and more fiery thought or feeling. There are gleams in 'The Atheist's Tragedy' of that clear light in which the whole Shakespearean world lay shining, and here and there the bright flames of the stars do still endure to lighten the gloom of it by flashes or by fits; the gentle and noble young lovers, whose patient loyalty is at last rescued from the toils of crime to be crowned with happiness and honour, are painted, though rapidly and slightly, with equal firmness of hand and tenderness of touch; and there is some vigorous and lively humour in the lighter action

of the comic scenes, however coarse and crude in handling: but there is no such relief to the terrors of the maturer work, whose sultrier darkness is visible only by the fire kindled of itself, very dreadful, which burns in the heart of the revenger whom it lights along his bloodstained way. Nor indeed is any relief wanted; the harmony of its fervent and stern emotion is as perfect, as sufficient, as sublime as the full rush and flow of its diction, the fiery majesty of its verse. There never was such a thunderstorm of a play: it quickens and exhilarates the sense of the reader as the sense of a healthy man or boy is quickened and exhilarated by the rolling music of a tempest and the leaping exultation of its flames. The strange and splendid genius which inspired it seems now not merely to feel that it does well to be angry, but to take such keen enjoyment in that feeling, to drink such deep delight from the inexhaustible wellsprings of its wrath, that rage and scorn and hatred assume something of the rapturous quality more naturally proper to faith and hope and love. There is not a breath of rant, not a pad of bombast, in the declamation which fills its dazzling scenes with fire: the language has no more perfect models of style than the finest of its more sustained and elevated passages. The verse is unlike any other man's in the solemn passion

of its music: if it reminds us of Shakespeare's or of Webster's, it is simply by right of kinship and equality of power with the most vivid and sonorous verse that rings from the lips of Coriolanus or of Timon, of Brachiano or the Duchess of Malfy; not by any servility of discipleship or reverberation of an imitative echo. It is so rich and full and supple, so happy in its freedom and so loyal in its instinct, that its veriest audacities and aberrations have an indefinable harmony of their own. Even if we admit that Tourneur is to Webster but as Webster is to Shakespeare, we must allow, by way of exception to this general rule of relative rank, that in his noblest hours of sustained inspiration he is at least the equal of the greater dramatist on the score of sublime and burning eloquence, poured forth in verse like the rushing of a mighty wind, with fitful breaks and pauses that do but enhance the majestic sweetness and perfection of its forward movement, the strenuous yet spontaneous energy of its triumphant ardour in advance.

To these magnificent qualities of poetry and passion no critic of the slightest note or the smallest pretention to poetic instinct has ever failed to do ample and cordial justice: but to the truthfulness and the power of Cyril Tourneur as a dramatic student and painter of human character,

not only has such justice not generally been done, but grave injustice has been too generally shown. It is true that not all the agents in the evolution of his greater tragedy are equally or sufficiently realised and vivified as active and distinct figures: true, for instance, that the two elder sons of the duchess are little more than conventional outlines of such empty violence and futile ambition as might be inferred from the crude and puerile symbolism of their respective designations: but the third brother is a type no less living than revolting and no less dramatic than detestable: his ruffian cynicism and defiant brutality are in life and death alike original and consistent, whether they express themselves in curses or in jeers. The brother and accomplice of the hero in the accomplishment of his manifold revenge is seldom much more than a serviceable shadow: but there is a definite difference between their sister and the common type of virginal heroine who figures on the stage of almost every dramatist then writing ; the author's profound and noble reverence for goodness gives at once precision and distinction to the outline and a glow of active life to the colour of this pure and straightforward study. The brilliant simplicity of tone which distinguishes the treatment of this character is less remarkable in the figure of the mother whose wickedness and weak-

ness are so easily played upon and blown about by every gust of penitence or temptation; but there is the same lifelike vigour of touch in the smallest detail of the scenes between her children and herself. It has been objected that her ready avowal of weakness as common to all her sex is the undramatic epigram of a satirist, awkwardly ventriloquising through the mechanism of a tragic puppet; but it is really quite in keeping with the woman's character to enlarge and extenuate the avowal of her own infamy and infirmity into a sententious reflection on womanhood in general. A similar objection has been raised against the apparent change of character implied in the confession made by the hero to the duke elect, at the close of the play, that he and his brother had murdered the old duke—'all for your grace's good,' and in the cry when arrested and sentenced to instant execution, 'Heart, was't not for your good, my lord?' But if this seems incompatible with the high sense of honour and of wrong which is the mainspring of Vindice's implacable self-devotion and savage unselfishness, the unscrupulous ferocity of the means through which his revenge is worked out may surely be supposed to have blunted the edge of his moral perception, distorted his natural instinct, and infected his nobler sympathies with some taint of contagious

egotism and pessimistic obduracy of imagination. And the intensity of sympathy with which this crowning creation of the poet's severe and fiery genius is steadily developed and displayed should make any critic of reasonable modesty think more than twice or thrice before he assumes or admits the likelihood or the possibility of so gross an error or so grave a defect in the conception of so great an artist. For if the claim to such a title might be disputed in the case of a claimant who could show no better credentials than his authorship of 'The Atheist's Tragedy'—and even in that far from faultless work of genius there are manifest and manifold signs, not merely of excellence, but of greatness—the claim of the man who could write 'The Revenger's Tragedy' is questionable by no one who has any glimmering of insight or perception as to what qualities they are which confer upon a writer the indisputable title to a seat in the upper house of poets.

This master work of Cyril Tourneur, the most perfect and most terrible incarnation of the idea of retribution impersonate and concentrated revenge that ever haunted the dreams of a tragic poet or the vigils of a future tyrannicide, is resumed and embodied in a figure as original and as impossible to forget, for any one who has ever felt the savage fascination of its presence, as

any of the humaner figures evoked and immortalised by Shakespeare. The rage of Swift, without his insanity and impurity, seems to utter in every word the healthier if no less consuming passion of a heart lacerated by indignation and envenomed by contempt as absolute, as relentless, and as inconsolable as his own. And in the very torrent of the man's meditative and solitary passion, a very Phlegethon of agony and fury and ravenous hunger after the achievement of a desperate expiation, comes the sudden touch of sarcasm which serves as a momentary breakwater to the raging tide of his reflections, and reveals the else unfathomable bitterness of a spiritual Marah that no plummet even of his own sinking can sound, and no infusion of less fiery sorrow or less venomous remembrance can sweeten. The mourner falls to scoffing, the justicer becomes a jester: the lover, with the skull of his murdered mistress in his hand, slides into such reflections on the influence of her living beauty as would beseem a sexless and malignant satirist of her sex. This power of self-abstraction from the individual self, this impersonal contemplation of a personal wrong, this contemptuous yet passionate scrutiny of the very emotions which rend the heart and inflame the spirit and poison the very blood of the thinker, is the special seal or sign of original inspiration which

distinguishes the type most representative of Tourneur's genius, most significant of its peculiar bias and its peculiar force. Such a conception, clothed in mere prose or in merely passable verse, would be proof sufficient of the mental power which conceived it; when expressed in such verse as follows, it proves at once and preserves for ever the claim of the designer to a place among the immortals.

> Thou sallow picture of my poisoned love,
> My study's ornament, thou shell of death,
> Once the bright face of my betrothed lady,
> When life and beauty naturally filled out
> These ragged imperfections;
> When two heaven-pointed diamonds were set
> In these unsightly rings;—then 'twas a face
> So far beyond the artificial shine
> Of any woman's bought complexion
> That the uprightest man (if such there be,
> That sin but seven times a day) broke custom
> And made up eight with looking after her.

The very fall of the verse has a sort of fierce and savage pathos in the note of it; a cadence which comes nearer to the echo of such laughter as utters the cry of an anguish too deep for weeping and wailing, for curses or for prayers, than anything in dramatic poetry outside the part of Hamlet. It would be a conjecture not less plausible than futile, though perhaps not less futile than plausible, which should suggest that the influence

of Shakespeare's Hamlet may be responsible for the creation of Tourneur's Vindice, and the influence of Tourneur's Vindice for the creation of Shakespeare's Timon. It is a certainty indisputable except by the blatant audacity of immedicable ignorance that the only poet to whose manner and style the style and manner of Cyril Tourneur can reasonably be said to bear any considerable resemblance is William Shakespeare. The more curt and abrupt style of Webster is equally unlike the general style of either. And if, as his first editor observes, 'the parallel' between Tourneur and Marston, 'as far as it goes, is so obvious that it is not worth drawing,' it is no less certain that the divergence between the genius which created Andrugio and the genius which created Vindice is at least as wide as the points of resemblance or affinity between them are vivid and distinct. While Marston's imaginative and tragic power was at its highest, his style was crude and quaint, turgid and eccentric; when he had cured and purified it—perhaps, as Gifford suggests, in consequence of Ben Jonson's unmerciful but salutary ridicule,—he approved himself a far abler writer of comedy or tragicomedy than before, but his right hand had forgotten its cunning as the hand of 'a tragic penman.' Now the improvement of Tourneur's style, an improvement amounting

to little less than transfiguration, keeps time with his advance as a student of character and a tragic dramatist as distinguished from a tragic poet. The style of his earlier play has much of beauty, of facility, and of freshness: the style of his later play, I must repeat, is comparable only with Shakespeare's. In the superb and inexhaustible imprecations of Timon there is a quality which reminds us of Cyril Tourneur as delightfully as we are painfully reminded of John Marston in reading certain scenes and passages which disfigure and deface the magnificent but incomprehensible composition of 'Troilus and Cressida.'

Of Tourneur's two elegies on the death of Sir Francis Vere and of Henry Prince of Wales, it may be said that they are about as good as Chapman's work of the same order: and it may be added that his first editor has shewn himself, to say the least, unreasonably and unaccountably virulent in his denunciation of what he assumes to be insincere and sycophantic in the elegiac expression of the poet's regret for a prince of such noble promise as the elder brother of Charles the First. The most earnest and fervent of republicans, if not wanting in common sense and common courtesy, would not dream of reflecting in terms of such unqualified severity on the lamentation of Lord Tennyson for the loss of Albert the Good: and

the warmest admirer of that loudly lamented person will scarcely maintain that this loss was of such grave importance to England as the loss of a prince who might probably have preserved the country from the alternate oppression of prelates and of Puritans, from the social tyranny of a dictator and the political disgrace of the Restoration.

The existence of a comedy by the author of 'The Revenger's Tragedy,' and of a comedy bearing the suggestive if not provocative title of 'Laugh and Lie Down,' must always have seemed to the students of Lowndes one of the most curious and amusing pieces of information to be gathered from the 'Bibliographer's Manual'; and it is with a sense of disappointment proportionate to this sense of curiosity that they will discover the non-existence of such a comedy, and the existence in its stead of a mere pamphlet in prose issued under that more than promising title: which yet, if attainable, ought surely to be reprinted, however dubious may be its claim to the honour of a great poet's authorship. In no case can it possibly be of less interest or value than the earliest extant publication of that poet—'The Transformed Metamorphosis.' Its first editor has given proof of very commendable perseverance and fairly creditable perspicacity in his devoted attempt at elucidation of this most astonishing and indescribable piece of work: but no inter-

pretation of it can hope to be more certain or more trustworthy than any possible exposition of Blake's 'Jerusalem' or the Apocalypse of St. John. All that can be said by a modest and judicious reader is that any one of these three effusions may unquestionably mean anything that anybody chooses to read into the text; that a Luther is as safe as a Loyola, that a Renan is no safer than a Cumming, from the chance of confutation as a less than plausible exponent of its possible significance: but that, however indisputable it may be that they were meant to mean something, not many human creatures who can be trusted to go abroad without a keeper will be likely to pretend to a positive understanding of what that significance may be. To me, the most remarkable point in Tourneur's problematic poem is the fact that this most monstrous example of senseless and barbarous jargon that ever disfigured English type should have been written—were it even for a wager—by one of the purest, simplest, most exquisite and most powerful writers in the language.

This extraordinary effusion is the single and certainly the sufficient tribute of a great poet, and a great master of the purest and the noblest English, to the most monstrous and preposterous taste or fashion of his time. As the product of

an eccentric imbecile it would be no less curious than Stanihurst's Virgil: as the work of Cyril Tourneur it is indeed 'a miracle instead of wit.' For it cannot be too often repeated that in mere style, in commanding power and purity of language, in positive instinct of expression and direct eloquence of inspiration, the author of 'The Revenger's Tragedy' stands alone in the next rank to Shakespeare. Many if not most of their contemporaries could compose a better play than he probably could conceive—a play with finer variation of incidents and daintier diversity of characters: not one of them, not even Webster himself, could pour forth poetry of such continuous force and flow. The fiery jet of his molten verse, the rush of its radiant and rhythmic lava, seems alone as inexhaustible as that of Shakespeare's. As a dramatist, his faults are doubtless as flagrant as his merits are manifest: as a writer, he is one of the very few poets who in their happiest moments are equally faultless and sublime. The tone of thought or of feeling which gives form and colour to this splendid poetic style is so essentially what modern criticism would define as that of a natural Hebraist, and so far from that of a Hellenist or Latinist of the Renascence, that we recognise in this great poet one more of those Englishmen of genius on whom the direct or

indirect influence of the Hebrew Bible has been actually as great as the influences of the country and the century in which they happened to be born. The single-hearted fury of unselfish and devoted indignation which animates every line of his satire is more akin to the spirit of Ezekiel or Isaiah than to the spirit of Juvenal or Persius: though the fierce literality of occasional detail, the prosaic accuracy of implacable and introspective abhorrence, may seem liker the hard Roman style of impeachment by photography than the great Hebrew method of denunciation by appeal. But the fusion of sarcastic realism with imaginative passion produces a compound of such peculiar and fiery flavour as we taste only from the tragic chalice of Tourneur or of Shakespeare. The bitterness which serves but as a sauce or spice to the meditative rhapsodies of Marston's heroes or of Webster's villains is the dominant quality of the meats and wines served up on the stage which echoes to the cry of Vindice or of Timon. But the figure of Tourneur's typic hero is as distinct in its difference from the Shakespearean figure which may possibly have suggested it as in its difference from the Shakespearean figure which it may not impossibly have suggested. There is perhaps too much play made with skulls and crossbones on the stage of Cyril Tourneur: he

cannot apparently realise the fact that they are properties of which a thoughtful poet's use should be as temperate and occasional as Shakespeare's: but the graveyard meditations of Hamlet, perfect in dramatic tact and instinct, seem cool and common and shallow in sentiment when set beside the intensity of inspiration which animates the fitful and impetuous music of such passages as these.

Here 's an eye
Able to tempt a great man—to serve God;
A pretty hanging lip, that has forgot now to dissemble.
Methinks this mouth should make a swearer tremble,
A drunkard clasp his teeth, and not undo 'em
To suffer wet damnation to run through 'em.
Here's a cheek keeps her colour let the wind go whistle;
Spout, rain, we fear thee not: be hot or cold,
All 's one with us; and is not he absurd,
Whose fortunes are upon their faces set
That fear no other God but wind and wet?
Hippolito. Brother, y'ave spoke that right;
Is this the face that living shone so bright?
Vindice. The very same.
And now methinks I could e'en chide myself
For doting on her beauty, though her death
Shall be revenged after no common action.
Does the silk-worm expend her yellow labours
For thee? for thee does she undo herself?
Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships
For the poor benefit of a bewitching minute? [1]

[1] This is not, I take it, one of the poet's irregular though not unmusical lines; the five short unemphatic syllables, rapidly run

Why does yon fellow falsify high-ways
And put his life between the judge's lips,
To refine such a thing, keeps horse and men
To beat their valours for her?
Surely we're all mad people, and they [1]
Whom we think are, are not: we mistake those:
'Tis we are mad in sense, they but in clothes.
Hippolito. 'Faith, and in clothes too we, give us our due.
Vindice. Does every proud and self-affecting dame
Camphire her face for this? and grieve her Maker
In sinful baths of milk—when many an infant starves,
For her superfluous outside,—all for this?

What follows is no whit less noble: but as much may be said of the whole part—and indeed of the whole play. Violent and extravagant as the mere action or circumstance may be or may appear, there is a trenchant straightforwardness of appeal in the simple and spontaneous magnificence of the language, a depth of insuppressible sincerity in the fervent and restless vibration of the thought, by which the hand and the brain and the heart of the workman are equally recognisable. But the crowning example of Cyril Tourneur's

together in one slurring note of scorn, being not more than equivalent in metrical weight to three such as would take their places if the verse were thus altered—and impaired:

For the poor price of one bewitching minute.

[1] Perhaps we might venture here to read—'and only they.' In the next line, 'whom' for 'who' is probably the poet's own license or oversight.

unique and incomparable genius is of course to be found in the scene which would assuredly be remembered, though every other line of the poet's writing were forgotten, by the influence of its passionate inspiration on the more tender but not less noble sympathies of Charles Lamb. Even the splendid exuberance of eulogy which attributes to the verse of Tourneur a more fiery quality, a more thrilling and piercing note of sublime and agonising indignation, than that which animates and inflames the address of Hamlet to a mother less impudent in infamy than Vindice's cannot be considered excessive by any capable reader who will candidly and carefully compare the two scenes which suggested this comparison. To attempt the praise or the description of anything that has been praised or described by Lamb would usually be the veriest fatuity of presumption: and yet it is impossible to write of a poet whose greatness was first revealed to his countrymen by the greatest critic of dramatic poetry that ever lived and wrote, and not to echo his words of righteous judgment and inspired applause with more or less feebleness of reiteration. The startling and magical power of single verses, ineffaceable and ineradicable from the memory on which they have once impressed themselves, the consciousness in which they have once struck root, which distinguishes and denotes the peculiar style

of Cyril Tourneur's tragic poetry, rises to its highest tidemark in this part of the play. Every other line, one might almost say, is an instance of it; and yet not a single line is undramatic, or deficient in the strictest and plainest dramatic propriety. It may be objected that men and women possessed by the excitement of emotions so desperate and so dreadful do not express them with such passionate precision of utterance: but, to borrow the saying of a later and more famous bearer of the name which Cyril sometimes spelt as Turner, 'don't they wish they could?' or rather, ought they not to wish it? What is said by the speakers is exactly what they might be expected to think, to feel, and to express with less incisive power and less impressive accuracy of ardent epigram or of strenuous appeal.[1]

[1] It is, to say the least, singular to find in the most famous scene of a play so often reprinted and re-edited a word which certainly requires explanation passed over without remark from any one of the successive editors. When Gratiana, threatened by the daggers of her sons, exclaims—

> Are you so barbarous to set iron nipples
> Upon the breast that gave you suck?

Vindice retorts, in reply to her appeal—

> That breast
> Is turned to quarled poison.

This last epithet is surely unusual enough to call for some attempt at interpretation. But none whatever has hitherto been offered. In the seventh line following from this one there is another

There are among poets, as there are among prose writers, some whose peculiar power finds vent only in a broad and rushing stream of speech or song, triumphant by the general force and fullness of its volume, in which we no more think of looking for single lines or phrases that may be detached from the context and quoted for their separate effect than of selecting for peculiar admiration some special wave or individual ripple from the multitudinous magnificence of the torrent or the tide. There are others whose power is shown mainly in single strokes or flashes as of

textual difficulty. The edition now before me, Eld's of 1608, reads literally thus :—

> *Vind.* Ah ist possible, *Thou onely*, you powers on hie,
> That women should dissemble when they die.

Lamb was content to read,

> Ah, is it possible, you powers on high,

and so forth. Perhaps the two obviously corrupt words in italics may contain a clue to the right reading, and this may be it.

> Ah !
> Is't possible, you heavenly powers on high,
> That women should dissemble when they die ?

Or may not this be yet another instance of the Jew-Puritan abhorrence of the word God as an obscene or blasphemous term when uttered outside the synagogue or the conventicle ? If so, we might read—and believe that the poet wrote—

> Is't possible, thou only God on high,

and assume that the licenser struck out the indecent monosyllable and left the mutilated text for actors and printers to patch or pad at their discretion.

lightning or of swords. There are few indeed outside the pale of the very greatest who can display at will their natural genius in the keenest concentration or the fullest effusion of its powers. But among these fewer than few stands the author of 'The Revenger's Tragedy.' The great scene of the temptation and the triumph of Castiza would alone be enough to give evidence, not adequate merely but ample, that such praise as this is no hyperbole of sympathetic enthusiasm, but simply the accurate expression of an indisputable fact. No lyrist, no satirist, could have excelled in fiery flow of rhetoric the copious and impetuous eloquence of the lines, at once luxurious and sardonic, cynical and seductive, in which Vindice pours forth the arguments and rolls out the promises of a professional pleader on behalf of aspiring self-interest and sensual self-indulgence: no dramatist that ever lived could have put more vital emotion into fewer words, more passionate reality into more perfect utterance, than Tourneur in the dialogue that follows them.

Mother. Troth, he says true.
Castiza. False: I defy you both:
I have endured you with an ear of fire:
Your tongues have struck hot irons on my face.
Mother, come from that poisonous woman there.
Mother. Where?
Castiza. Do you not see her? she's too inward then.

I could not count the lines which on reperusal of this great tragic poem I find apt for illustrative quotation, or suggestive of a tributary comment: but enough has already been cited to prove beyond all chance of cavil from any student worthy of the name that the place of Cyril Tourneur is not among minor poets, nor his genius of such a temper as naturally to attract the sympathy or arouse the enthusiasm of their admirers; that among the comrades or the disciples who to us may appear but as retainers or satellites of Shakespeare his rank is high and his credentials to that rank are clear. That an edition more carefully revised and annotated, with a text reduced to something more of coherence and intelligible arrangement, than has yet been vouchsafed to us, would suffice to place his name among theirs of whose eminence the very humblest of their educated countrymen are ashamed to seem ignorant, it would probably be presumptuous to assert. But if the noblest ardour of moral emotion, the most fervent passion of eager and indignant sympathy with all that is best and abhorrence of all that is worst in women or in men—if the most absolute and imperial command of all resources and conquest of all difficulties inherent in the most effective and the most various instrument ever yet devised for the poetry of the tragic drama—if the

keenest insight and the sublimest impulse that can guide the perception and animate the expression of a poet whose line of work is naturally confined to the limits of moral or ethical tragedy—if all these qualities may be admitted to confer a right to remembrance and a claim to regard, there can be no fear and no danger of forgetfulness for the name of Cyril Tourneur.

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